

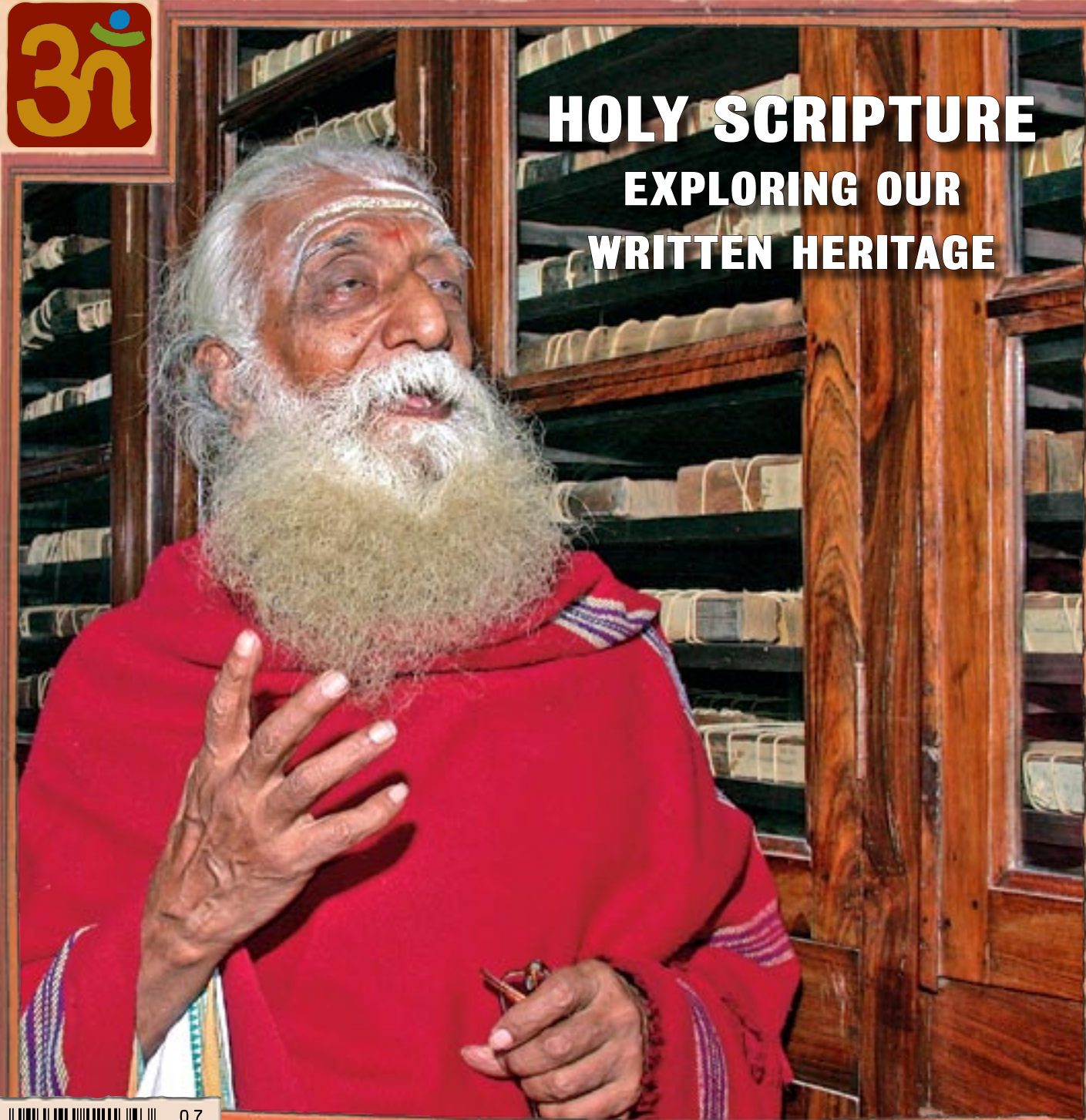
HINDUISM TODAY

July/August/September, 2006 US\$5.95

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



HOLY SCRIPTURE EXPLORING OUR WRITTEN HERITAGE



COURTESY FRENCH INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERRY



COURTESY FRENCH INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERRY

COVER: Linguist Sambanda Sivacharyar, 79, stands in front of the French Institute of Pondicherry's extraordinary collection of 8,600 scriptures, many in their original palm leaf form. The fragile leaves (above) are brushed with lemongrass oil preservative.

JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 2006 • HINDU YEAR 5108
VYAYA, THE YEAR OF WEALTH

Bodhinatha Veylanswami
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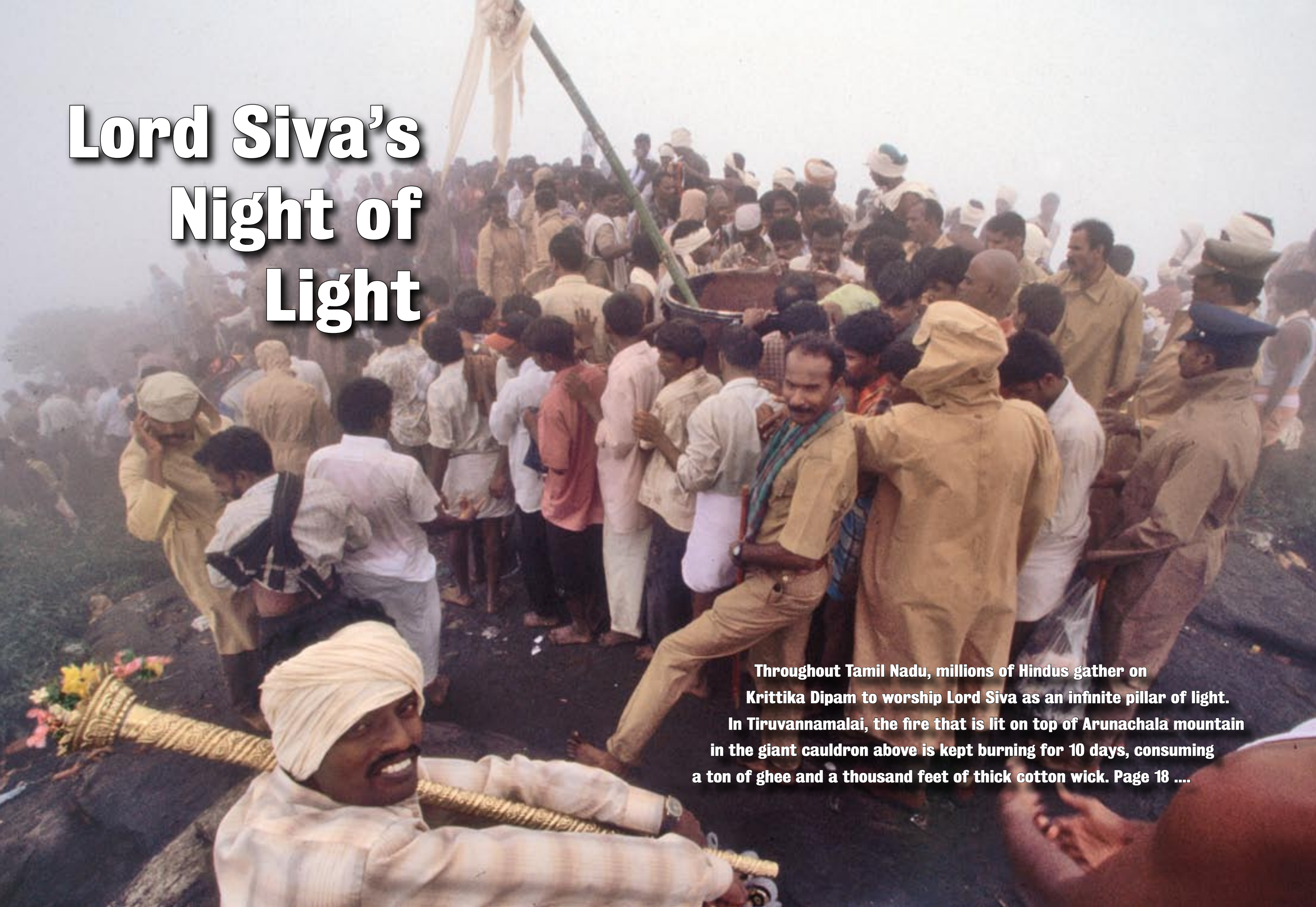
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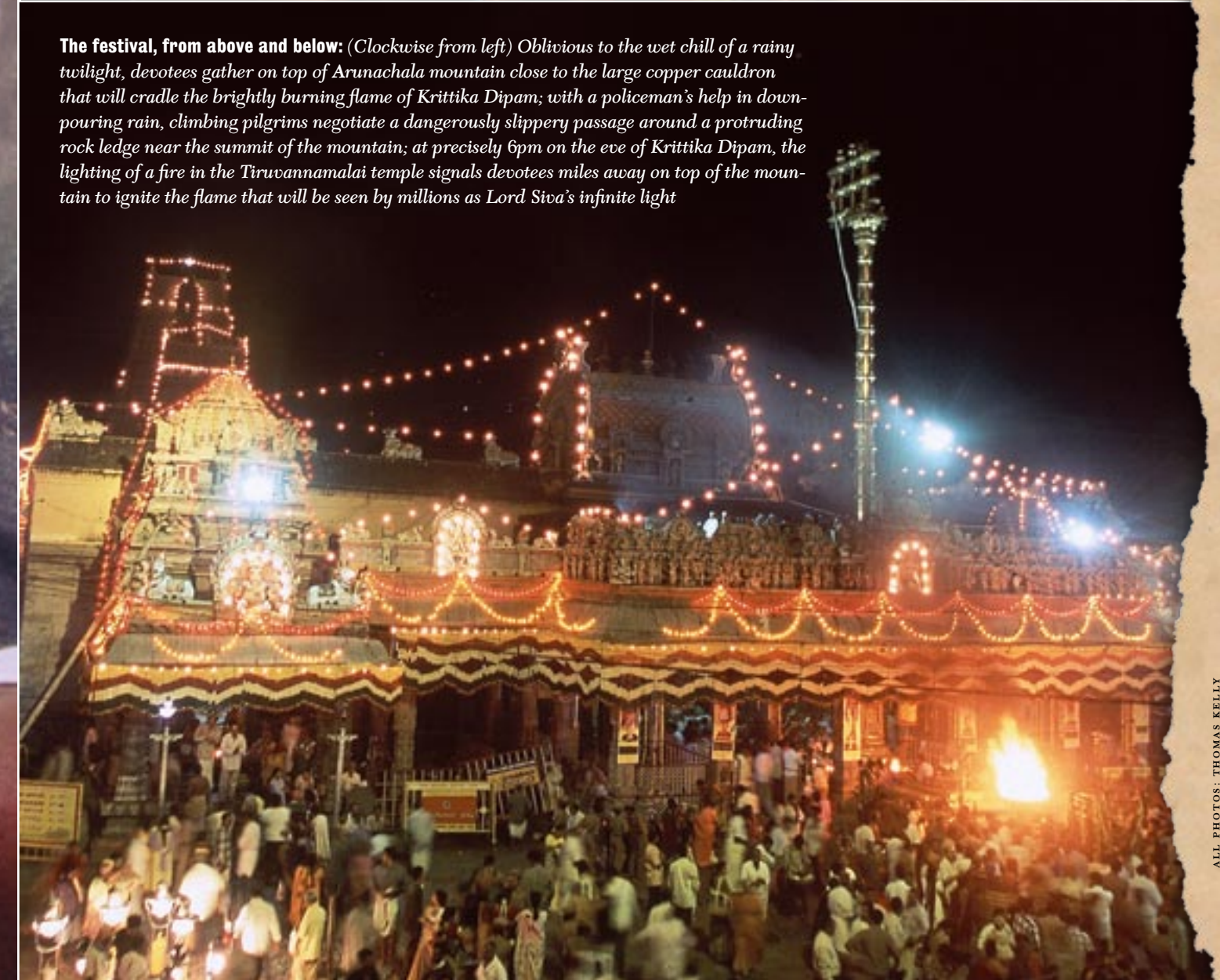
Lord Siva's Night of Light



Throughout Tamil Nadu, millions of Hindus gather on Krittika Dipam to worship Lord Siva as an infinite pillar of light. In Tiruvannamalai, the fire that is lit on top of Arunachala mountain in the giant cauldron above is kept burning for 10 days, consuming a ton of ghee and a thousand feet of thick cotton wick. Page 18



The festival, from above and below: (Clockwise from left) Oblivious to the wet chill of a rainy twilight, devotees gather on top of Arunachala mountain close to the large copper cauldron that will cradle the brightly burning flame of Krittika Dipam; with a policeman's help in down-pouring rain, climbing pilgrims negotiate a dangerously slippery passage around a protruding rock ledge near the summit of the mountain; at precisely 6pm on the eve of Krittika Dipam, the lighting of a fire in the Tiruvannamalai temple signals devotees miles away on top of the mountain to ignite the flame that will be seen by millions as Lord Siva's infinite light



Welcome

TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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Left to right: *Santhalinga Ramasamy, Tamil Nadu, Somasundara Thesika Gnanasampanthi, Jaffna, Bodhinatha Veylanswami USA*

A U S T R A L I A

Saiva Council Conference

JANUARY 27-29, 2006, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, WAS THE VENUE for the 10th World Saiva Conference, held by the World Saiva Council, founded in 1992 in Chennai, by the late H.H. Swami Siva Nandi Adikalar (UK). The Council is the international education arm of the London Meikandhar Aadheenam and is exclusively oriented to Saiva Siddhanta as manifest in Tamil culture and literature. Lingayat and Kashmir Saivism are not encompassed. This year's gathering brought thousands of Saivites together from 10 countries. Three monastic religious leaders from Tamil Nadu, India, Jaffna, Sri Lanka and Hawaii, USA, were present. Discussions and presentations focused on basic Saiva Siddhanta, the challenges facing the revival of Saivism in the modern era, clarifying the identity of Saivism within Hinduism, fostering participation of women and youth, and more.

U S A

Sacred Space At Home

WHILE HOME SHRINES ARE nothing new to Hindus—or religious families of many faiths—it is interesting that designing personal sacred space is a hot new trend in America. The spread of Fung Shui and Vastu knowledge, in response to the need for connectedness and peace in our noisy, fragmented world, are leading many to establish an altar at home. The trend is eclectic, syncretic and great for business at shops that sell everything from statues of Ganesha, Mother Mary, Quan Yin and Buddha, to incense, bells, lamps and books on Vastu.



Buddha and Ganesha are popular, along side pictures of your family and grandmother

Light a lamp, add a few flowers, a bowl of water, open up your latest Internet dot com business plan for review by your guardian spirits and sit for a twenty-minute meditation for peace of mind before rushing off to work.

DIASPORA

T H A I L A N D

Brahma Deity Broken in Bangkok

THE FAMED LANDMARK statue of the four-faced Brahma outside the Erawan Hotel in Central Bangkok, was smashed with a hammer by Thanakorn Pakdeepol, a

Muslim, early in the morning, March 21, 2006. By the time police arrived, he had been beaten unconscious. He died soon afterwards. Two shrine cleaners were arrested for the murder. Thanakorn's father said his 27-year-old son had been in and out of mental hospitals over the past ten years. The popular 50-year-old image was draped with sheets. The faithful prayed sadly and offered yellow garlands and lotus flowers.



Bangkok's Brahma Deity was widely worshiped by Thai Buddhists

U S A

Court-Ordered Vote Settles New York Temple Dispute

AFIVE-YEAR LONG BATTLE BETWEEN A GROUP OF NEW YORK Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam devotees and it's board of trustees came to a close in March of this year after a court-ordered election resulted in the incumbent trustees' being voted in and retaining control. The complex case raised temple management issues side-by-side with larger questions on the separation of Church and State. "Insurgent" devotees claimed that the temple's original by-laws required elections. But the incumbent board cited a subsequent set of by-laws which made the board a self-appointed body. The challengers claimed, and the court agreed, that the latter by-laws were not legally adopted. While the challengers won by getting the court-ordered vote, their slate of directors lost to the incumbent board by a wide margin. It remains unclear if the by-laws will now be changed to make the board self appointing, or if regular elections will continue to be held.



One of the oldest US temples embroiled in power struggles

M A L A Y S I A

Dynamic New Malaysia Hindu Mission

A NEW ORGANIZATION IS arising in Malaysia, a country whose Hindu history goes back for millennia but where home-grown Hindu religious leaders have been few and far between. Immigration laws have not allowed ordained swamis (or temple priests) who are not Malaysian to take up permanent residence. For decades the only "official" swami in the nation was the one heading the Divine Life Society in Kuala Lumpur, presently Swami Guhabhaktananda.

These days a few more Malaysians are taking to renunciate life. One is Maharishi Paramahansa Shankarananda Guruji, who was initiated in India by a mystic sage in the lineage of Sri Raghavendraswami, the famed 16th century Tamil Vaishnava

proponent of Madhva dualism. Shankarananda Swami says the sage gave him the title "Maharishi Paramahamsa." After a period of wading and sadhana in India, he returned to Malaysia and, in 1998, founded the Shankarananda Mission, also known as the Dakshina Mantralaya, in the southern state of Johore, just north of Singapore.

The Mission has evolved rapidly. Propounding a universalistic-Hindu philosophy, swami maintains an orthodox Hindu ritual tradition. He conducts pujas and festivals, teaches yoga and meditation, and spiritual camps, and trains aspirants for monastic life as monks and nuns. The Mission and is also active in social service, providing four free meals a day for the public, caring for animals through its Pet Care Center, delivering groceries to the needy, holding motivation



Maharishi Paramahamsa Shankarananda Guruji of Johore surrounded by his disciples and devotees—a new young force for Hinduism in Malaysia

sessions for students in schools, raising funds for victims of natural disasters. Currently Guruji has a monastic order of five *sannyasins*, two yogis, a number of *brahmacharis* and *brahmacharinis*.

The Mission stands proudly as a positive force for Sanatana Dharma in this country where Hindus face challenges from modernization and other forces.

See www.gurunath.org

M A U R I T I U S

Giant Siva Graces Island

A 108-FOOT TALL SIVA statue named "Mangal Mahadev" now welcomes pilgrims at Ganga Talao (Grand Bassin) crater lake, a famous pilgrimage place on the island of Mauritius. Minister of Environment Anil Baichoo, master-mind behind the project, told HINDUISM TODAY, "It was our dream to have something special to welcome pilgrims on their arrival to this holy lake. The devotees can now see Lord Siva from a distance and be inspired to lovingly walk up to the lake, despite being exhausted after a long march." In 1991 Baichoo was inspired by the 80-foot Siva statue at India's Palam Airport. A group of volunteers led by the late Gulshan Kulmar started planning for a similar one at Lord Siva's sacred home in Mauritius. The project finally took off in 2003 when the foundation was started. A crew from Rajasthan, India, under the supervision of Shri Mathuram was commissioned for the project. After



108-foot-tall Siva: *a prominent sign of devotion and inspiration for Hindus of Mauritius*

three years the ^{us\$}389,000, concrete statue is almost complete with the help and donations of volunteers and well-wishers. Beautifully crafted, the statue inspires devotion. A copper and zinc coating is being applied. The official consecration is scheduled for late 2006.



Weekly satsang at Sujata Jagwani's home shrine, Montego Bay, Jamaica

J A M A I C A

Hindus Thrive In Jamaica

IN JAMAICA, THE THIRD largest island in the Caribbean and the tourist haven of reggae music, 3.4 percent of the three million population are Indians. The first wave of Hindu migrants, 36,000 indentured sugar plantation laborers, arrived in 1845. Their religion

and culture went virtually unrecognized until 1956. Despite this, many held on to their faith and customs. The second wave of Hindus started in 1927 with the influx of Sindhi businessmen, and the third with Indian professionals in 1970. Michelle Daswani tells HINDUISM TODAY that Hinduism is now thriving on this tropical paradise. Families conduct traditional celebrations, such as Dipavali, Sivaratri, Ganesha Chathurti and Janmashtami. A mandir located in the capital city, Kingston, is well attended. Devotees hold prayers and satsangs in their homes. Some families have spacious home shrines to accommodate larger groups. Holding Jamaica's motto "Out of Many, One People" close to their hearts, Hindus here and are an integral part of the national ethnic landscape.



Ramayana characters find a new home in a line of Virgin Comics featuring characters from India's rich literary heritage

U S A

Virgin Comics Repackages India's Lore

LOOKING TOWARD ASIA AS the entertainment frontier, Indian comic book company Gotham Entertainment Group has formed a partnership with Virgin empire mogul Sir Richard Branson to create Virgin

Comics and Virgin Animation. Among the companies' first projects will be a comic book and television series based on *The Ramayana*, which Gotham Chopra (Deepak's son and the new venture's chief creative officer,) describes as "The Eastern equivalent of *The Odyssey*." Chopra explains that Virgin will have three distinct types of comics: the Director's Cut line, which will showcase work from Hollywood; the Maverick line, which will develop graphic novels; and the Shakti line, which will focus on "Asian-edged" content to capitalize on the growing global interest in Indian and Asian characters. The new companies, based in New York and Bangalore, are using Asian-influenced comics as the platform to build a global media company that will eventually create movies, video games, digital applications and TV programming. The comic book *Ramayana Reborn* is scheduled to be published this summer, with the animated series to come later. See: www.virgincomics.com and www.gothamcomics.com

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BRIEFLY...

IN APRIL, MALAYSIA AUTHORITIES demolished a century-old Hindu temple in Kuala Lumpur, bulldozing the building as devotees cried and begged them to stop. The temple was standing on government land. Bulldozers came in the middle of prayers.

A STOLEN 9TH CENTURY STONE Vishnu Diety with carvings of all the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu began its journey

back home to be reinstalled in the Varaha Temple in Mand-sour, Madhya Pradesh, from where it was stolen six years ago. American investigators on a tip from Indian police and Interpol, traced it to an art dealer in New York who was working out of his apartment. The Deity had passed through so many hands that no charges could be made.

DECREASING GANGA WATER levels have devotees worried.

U S A

Minnesota Temple Vandalized

THE INSIDE OF A HINDU temple under construction in Maple Grove, Minnesota, was vandalized on the night of April 5, 2006. Temple doors were kicked in, windows broken and holes smashed in walls and ceilings of the auditorium, dining hall and classrooms. Nine of the 14 stone Deities were broken into pieces. The inauguration of the \$8-million temple, scheduled to open in early June, was postponed to July, 2006. New Deities are being prepared in India. Insurance only covered a portion of the damage, and a

\$200,000 reconstruction and security system fund-raising drive has been started

A pickup truck was spotted leaving the temple, but there are as yet no suspects. The FBI joined the investigation. A week after the crime, a Concerned Citizens Forum was held and attended by 600 people, including congress persons, state legislators, the mayor, city council members, the city administrator, the chief of police and representatives from other religious organizations. Temple president Shashikant Sane said they have also raised funds for an Interfaith Education Fund to educate the local community in Hinduism. Minnesota is home to more than 20,000 Hindus. The new 43,000-square-foot temple will be the largest in the state and surrounding area.



Nine of the 14 stone Deities of the new temple in Maple Grove, Minnesota, were broken. New images are being made in India.

They cite the filling of Tehri dam above Rishikesh as the cause. This year in April, in Haridwar, the river was so low that pilgrims could not take a holy dip. Religious leaders are speaking out and approaching the government for solutions.

SRI SELLATHURAI SWAMI, president of Sivathondan Nilayam, Jaffna, Sri Lanka (a society established by Siva Yogaswami, guru of Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY), passed away on April 12 at 2pm. Three months earlier, he told devotees that

he would discard his body after the 42nd Mahasamadhi celebrations of Satguru Yogaswami, which took place on April 7. He was 92.

SOMNATH TEMPLE NOW OFFERS remotes for devotees to perform *abhishekam*. Security restrictions prevent devotees from personally offering Ganga water to the Jyotirlinga. Now, with just a \$2.27 ticket, the priest will give you a remote control. Press the button and Ganges water stored in a nearby tank flows down and bathes the Sivalingam as you watch.



HINDU RENAISSANCE TEAM

HINDUISM TODAY was founded January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish a resource for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, reports on events and encouraging others to subscribe.

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IN MY OPINION

Confronting Misconceptions

Hinduism should be properly taught in schools

BY VAMSEE JULURI

HINDUISM HAS BEEN misrepresented and insulted in California history textbooks. Even before the state Board of Education met in March to vote on adopting suggested changes (See page 36), Hindu parents were outraged and the local Hindu community was at war over this issue, all at a time when President Bush was saying that India and America were "global leaders and good friends."

I feel a moral obligation to stand with indignant Hindu parents in demanding that changes be made in textbooks for California middle-school students. Such perpetuation of an unnecessary ignorance about Hinduism and Indian culture has not only hurt the feelings of immigrant children, it has also hindered a delicate alliance that has just begun to flower between India and the USA. When President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed their historic nuclear agreement earlier this year, it seemed that the two countries were serious about working together on issues ranging from security and trade to education and culture. However, the future of this relationship depends on rejecting old frameworks and mistaken assumptions. These misrepresentations of Hinduism in textbooks form a part of that negative past that has no place in a positive future.

I disagree with those academics who view these demands for changes in the textbooks as being part of a "Hindu extremist conspiracy." I am no supporter of religious extremism, but extremism is not an issue here. All we seek to accomplish is to correct three fundamental misconceptions.

First, there is a problem with the California textbooks defining Hinduism as a religion of caste and gender discrimination. This perception has been challenged by the Hindu community for a number of reasons, including fairness (other religions are not defined largely by their faults) and, of course, accuracy. I do not suggest that these problems do not exist. I simply feel that there is a better time and place to ad-



dress them than in the first lessons schoolchildren receive on Hinduism.

Second, it is true that—as the textbooks state—the term "Hinduism" refers to a complex diversity of traditions that are difficult to unify or summarize in terms of founders, dates and origins. But this is Hinduism's virtue, not its vice. The presentation of Hinduism in California's textbooks is

out of sync with the way that Hinduism is lived by its followers. For example, many textbooks, even in India, refer to Hinduism being the religion of "Aryan invaders." The issue of an Aryan invasion in India is complex. What is relevant here is that Hindus simply don't dwell on this matter during their daily worship.

Third, the disrespect of Hindu "myths" in these textbooks is plainly insulting. If Hindus think about an Elephant God writing an epic and a Monkey God leaping over an ocean, they are neither ignorant nor are they merely celebrating "stories." For devout Hindus, these are not characters from fairy tales; they are Gods.

There has been a history of stereotyping and misrepresenting Hinduism in this country. Katherine Mayo's vicious 1927 book, *Mother India*, was referred to by Mohandas Gandhi as a "drain-inspector's report," because of its graphic description of the stench of India's open drains. The 1984 "Indiana Jones" movie, *Temple of Doom*, deeply upset Hindus with its bizarre fantasies about Indian dining customs. Perpetuating these stereotypes is not in the best interests of India or the United States.

Religion is like a mother. It has made us who we are. To use the name of a great religion as a synonym for vileness, as a few scholars have done recently, is not only unscholarly, it is hurtful. I am tempted to say to these people, "You are savaging the mother of a civilization."

VAMSEE JULURI is an associate professor of media studies at the University of San Francisco

How Our Soul Matures

People the world over are working for spiritual advancement. But just what is the soul and how does it progress and mature?

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

IN HINDU THOUGHT THE CONCEPT OF LIFE and the soul are synonymous. For example, the Sanskrit word *jiva* refers to both and contains the meanings of individual soul, living being, life, vitality, energy, spirit and strength. The Tamil word *uyir* has the same double meaning of life and soul.

The soul, which is so perplexing and seemingly out of reach to many, can be understood simply as life itself. One of the advantages of this simple description is that it makes it easy to experience the soul. How can we do this? Just look into a mirror. Specifically, look deeply into your eyes and see the light and sparkle within them. That life, vitality, willpower and awareness is your soul, your divinity, the real you, that which continues on after the physical body's passing. Looking into the eyes of another, you can become aware of the life within that person and thereby see the soul and acknowledge his or her divine nature.

The Tamil word *uyirkuyir* takes this concept of divinity one step further. It is translated as "God, who is the Life of life, the Soul of the soul." A philosophical phrase that conveys the same meaning is "God is the essence of the soul," implying that if you look deeply enough into the soul, you will experience God.

How do we know, when seeing the life within ourselves or others, if we are experiencing the individual, evolving soul, or experiencing God as the essence of the soul, the Life of life? Here is one way to make that distinction. When we are perceiving an individual soul or souls, there is a sense that every soul is separate from the others. However, when we perceive God as the Life of life, that sense of separateness is replaced with a sense of oneness. Thus, if you can look at a group of people and be aware of the divine oneness that pervades them all, you would be seeing God in them. This deeper experience is achieved through internalizing our awareness, going deeply inside ourselves through worship or meditation.

An analogy can be made to *japa* beads. We can focus on the beads and perceive them as 109 separate beads. We can also focus on the cord on which they are strung and see the oneness that connects all the beads. A popular story about Paramaguru Yogaswami illustrates this point. There were four people gathered to sing devotional songs in his small hut one day. Yogaswami asked, "How many are here?" Someone replied, "Four, swami." Yogaswami countered, "No. Only one is here." He saw the unity; they saw the diversity.

The Hindu idea that God is inside every person as the essence of the soul, which can be experienced today, is quite different from the concept of Western religions that God is up in heaven and cannot be experienced by those living on Earth. They believe they have to die to meet God. Gurudeva often spoke



of the immediacy of God's presence: "God is so close to us. He is closer than our breathing, nearer to us than our hands or feet. Yes, He is the very essence of our soul."

Turning now to the goal of life, we know the Hindu perspective is that life's ultimate purpose is to make spiritual progress. This is also described as evolving, maturing or unfolding spiritually. All of these terms refer to enjoying ever more profound realizations of God—personal experiences that deepen our understandings of life and transform our very nature—culminating in moksha, liberation from rebirth on planet Earth.

We can usefully distinguish here the Hindu view of the spiritual destination—experience of God and subsequent liberation—and the journey

to that destination, which we are speaking of here. By focusing on the journey and the steps in front of us, we progress more surely and swiftly.

Let's ask the question, "What, exactly, is it that makes this spiritual progress?" Not the personality. Not the intellect. Not the emotions. It is, of course, the soul. In thinking of spiritual progress, it is helpful to understand the concept of the soul as a human-like, self-effulgent form comprised of the life and light we previously talked about. Technically, there are two terms in Sanskrit for this immortal soul body: *anandamaya kosha*, "bliss body," and *karana sharira*, "causal body." Just as our physical body matures from an infant into an adult, so too does this self-effulgent body of light mature in resplendence and intelligence, evolving as its consciousness expands, gradually strengthening its inner nerve system, progressing from ignorance of God to intimate communion with God. In Sanskrit, this advancing on the path is called *adhyatma prasara*, spiritual evolution. It is a process that takes place over many lifetimes, not just one.

Gurudeva shared, from his own experience, a mystical description of the soul body in *Merging with Siva*: "One day you will see the being of you, your divine soul body. You will see it inside the physical body. It looks like clean, clear plastic. Around it is a blue light, and the outline of it is whitish yellow. Inside of it is blue-yellowish light, and there are trillions of little nerve currents, or quanta, and light scintillating all through that. This body stands on a lotus flower. Inwardly looking down through your feet, you see you are standing on a big, beautiful lotus flower. This body has a head, it has eyes, and it has infinite intelligence. It is tuned into and feeds from the source of all energy." Similar descriptions of the soul as a body of light are found in our sacred scriptures and in yogis' writings.

Hastening progress: Let's turn now to the question of what can we do to hasten the unfoldment of our soul. In Hindu



thought, there are fourteen great nerve centers in the physical body (*sthula sharira*), in the astral body (*sukshma sharira*) and in the body of the soul (*karana sharira*). These centers are called *chakras* in Sanskrit, which means "wheels." Esoterically, spiritual unfoldment relates to the raising of the kundalini force, the serpent power, and the subsequent awakening of these chakras within our subtle bodies. Everyone has all of the chakras, though they usually are content to live in only a few.

There are six chakras above the *muladhara* chakra, which is located at the base of the spine. When awareness is flowing through these chakras, consciousness is in the higher nature. There are seven chakras below the *muladhara* chakra, and when awareness is flowing through them, consciousness is in the lower nature. Most Hindu teachings regarding the chakras focus on the yogi's awakening, balancing or stimulating the *muladhara* chakra and the six above. These seven centers of consciousness govern, in order, memory, reason, willpower, direct cognition, divine love, divine sight and illumination/Godliness. However, my guru has a different emphasis. He states that spiritual unfoldment is not a process of awakening the higher chakras, but of closing off the chakras below the *muladhara*. The seven chakras, or *talas*, below the spine, down to the feet, are all seats of instinctive consciousness, the origin, respectively, of fear, anger, jealousy, confusion, selfishness, absence of conscience and malice.

Brahmadvara, the doorway to the Narakaloka located just

Mature souls: Spiritual men and women gather in a sacred forest retreat in India. Their efforts to transform themselves, though strenuous, have brought purity, deep insight and a maturity of soul. Their radiant auras are a sign of their attainment.

below the *muladhara*, has to be sealed off so that it becomes impossible for fears, hatreds, angers and jealousies to arise. Once this begins to happen, the *muladhara* chakra is stabilized and consciousness slowly and naturally expands into the higher chakras. As the kundalini force of awareness travels along the spine, it enters each of these higher chakras, energizing them and awakening, in turn, each function according to the intensity of spiritual effort.

This understanding of the centrality of sealing off the lower chakras highlights how important emotional control is to our spiritual progress. Certainly the emotion that is the most important for people on the spiritual path to control is anger. Just possessing the knowledge that anger prevents us from experiencing the higher chakras increases our motivation to live a life that is totally free from this devastating force. Anger comes in many forms, ranging from frustration and resentment to uncontrollable rage. In its simplest shade, it is an instinctive, emotional protest to happenings at a particular moment. "Things are just not right!" anger shrieks. The source of peace and contentment is the opposite sentiment—a wholesome, intelligent acceptance of life's conditions, based on the understanding that God has given us a perfect universe in which to grow and learn, and each challenge or seeming imperfection we encounter is an opportunity for spiritual advancement. To those who are anger-prone, I advise replacing that fuming reaction with an affirmation that everything is just as it should be in God's perfect universe.

An initial focus on controlling anger and the other lower emotions and instincts is wisely built into the traditional concept of yoga as having eight limbs. The first limb is *yama*, which means restraint and is exactly what we have described—controlling our base emotions and instincts. Unfortunately, many modern yoga teachers and texts leave out this essential step that allows us to keep awareness above the lower chakras. Having sealed off the lower chakras, we are naturally drawn to be of service to others, to worship regularly and thereby deepen our devotion to God and to look within through meditation to experience our soul nature and eventually God's indwelling presence as our very essence.

The regular practice of these traditional spiritual disciplines not only keeps our awareness in the higher chakras, it also provides nourishment to our soul body. The soul body starts to grow within the emotional body. Gurudeva described this growth process by saying that the soul body grows like a child, fed by all of our good deeds. All of our service and selfless actions toward others feed that body. All of our working with ourselves to conquer instinctive emotions is food for that body, as it draws from the central source of energy. Finally, the spiritual body matures to the point where it becomes aware in the superconscious, intuitive mind, taking on more spiritual force from the Infinite. Ultimately, it takes over the astral emotional-intellectual body. And after moksha is achieved, it continues maturing in the inner worlds.

LETTERS

Conversion in Malaysia

THE LETTER “IN NEED OF HINDU REFORM” (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2006) truly depicts the sad situation of Hindus in Malaysia. Large numbers of Hindus have become Christians overnight. Even aged parents are dragged by their converted children into Christianity. They celebrate Pongal in churches and say Pongal is a nonreligious festival. They send pamphlets of Christian teachings to families in bereavement. Even the sick are not spared—they say if you convert to Christianity you will get a ticket to heaven, otherwise you are stuck in purgatory for eternity. The Christians say Jesus will cure you; the vulnerable Hindu converts, only to die in a week or a month. Like a savior, the Christian group marches into the home and takes charge of the funeral of the convert. It is sad, disgusting and frustrating to see the Hindu community being exploited and degraded. I feel ignorance is the root cause of this conversion. Ninety percent of Hindus know nothing of Hinduism except temple worship and some rituals. Many Hindus do now know the contents of the *Vedas*, the *purusharthas*, *nitya* karmas, *yamas* and *ni-yamas*. A properly organized teaching is not readily available for Hindus in this country, and Christian groups are taking advantage. I would suggest the Hindu Sangam of Malaysia send a directive to all registered temples to teach Hinduism to all devotees. Secondly, train teachers to teach Hindu children using a standardized syllabus. The Saivites, Shaktas, Vaishnavas and the Smartas should come under one flag to discuss this topic and bring out a concrete plan. Otherwise, the Hindus are going to be diminished in this century.

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Tamil Nadu Temples

I AM AN INDIAN SOUTH AFRICAN. I DID A pilgrimage tour of most of the temples in South India and was disappointed to experience some of the priests demanding to see the money before performing a prayer or *arati*. Some of the temples charged a miserable pittance as a form of donation to the temple. I have also visited temples in Europe. Some do charge a levy (significantly more), and others require donations before entering. They are not shy. I suggest these charges be increased to maintain the historic buildings, setting fixed rates for pujas (locals v. tourists/pilgrims) and giving a portion of the income to the priest. I would also like to know why Hindus are not taught to donate a portion of their salary to the temple. Most of the young professionals of my age group have sufficient funds to donate,

but we were never taught to donate to the temple. Is there nothing in the scriptures that says this? In Islam and Christianity it is traditional to give one-tenth of one's income to the mosque or church.

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✓ **HINDUISM TODAY** founder Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami teaches about the Sanatana Dharma's tradition of dashamamsha, or tithing, voluntarily giving one-tenth of one's gross income to a religious organization, in his book *Living with Siva, Chapter 6, Lesson 38*, available on the web at www.himalayanacademy.com/resources/books/.

Milk Miracle Not Enough?

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THAT for God to exist there should be miracles and that His/Her presence should be personally felt. For such skeptics, what other evidence could be needed in recent times than the milk miracle (“1995 Milk Miracle Video Online,” Hindu Press International, Mar. 19, 2006)? Those who claim that this was no miracle and “plain science” and that statues would gulp milk or any other liquid anyway have no answer to why statues suddenly stopped gulping milk after that miracle day. If such a similar miracle had taken place amongst Christians, it would have been publicized in no time by its adherents as proof of Christianity's supremacy. But in our country, where people suffer a tremendous inferiority complex, no one stood up to say that this event proves that Hinduism is superior. Nay, the media cancelled out the experiences of millions of devotees, participants and eye-witnesses to this historic event by issuing vague, silly, nonsensical explanations. Scientists were suddenly saying that what all of us witnessed with our own eyes should not be considered the truth, that what the scientists speculated should be considered as fact. What happened to the “seeing is believing” theory?

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Born for Balaji

THANK YOU FOR BEAUTIFULLY PRESENTING my views in **HINDUISM TODAY** (“Born for Balaji,” Apr/May/Jun, 2006). The magazine is wonderful; my blessings are with you. You are doing good work in service of Hindu Dharma. I will pray to Lord Balaji that your correspondent, Rajiv Malik, visits Tirupati again. I also liked your cover story on Balaji in the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2006, issue.

A.V. RAMANA DIKSHITULU, CHIEF PRIEST
TIRUPATI, INDIA

Hindus' Low Self-Esteem

I FOUND THE LETTER “HINDU NAMES MISpronounced” (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2005) very disappointing. It is incredible that Hindus have such a low esteem of themselves that they will use any excuse to justify decisions that they know are wrong. The author instructs us that because Americans cannot pronounce her name correctly, she elected to give her son a Western name. This has to go down as a very silly excuse. There is nothing in Hindu culture that says you cannot give names of your choosing. Every parent has the right to do so. You can name a child anything you like, as long as you do it for the right reason. If you do select a Western name, then do so because you like it, because it has meaning to you, but don't blame the culture. In the UK we also have our share of Hindus who use every excuse to entertain their low esteem of their own culture. They blame anything and everyone but themselves for their own shallow understanding of what it is to be a Hindu. One has to be proud of one's heritage. Be true to yourself and the world will yield.

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Thank You for the Puja

I HAVE BEEN READING **HINDUISM TODAY** for the last eleven years after being introduced to it by my father. Born into a family that built and manages a Ganesh temple in Malaysia, I was naturally inclined to learn more about my religion, and one of the many ways is through **HINDUISM TODAY**. The latest magazine introduced a simple method to worship Lord Ganesh (“Home Puja,” Apr/May/Jun, 2006) step by step with Romanized Sanskrit. It is great because in this modern age some priests or brahmins are still reluctant to teach such knowledge to others, claiming ownership. Because of this ignorance much knowledge of this great religion has disappeared together with the teachers who have decided that others should not know more than they do—sad, but true.

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Jai New Mandir in Delhi!

I HAVE RECEIVED, TO MY UTTER DELIGHT, the latest issue of **HINDUISM TODAY**, and as usual find the write-ups and color photographs most interesting and so appealing. It is a privilege to receive the world's best magazine on Hindu Dharma with universal coverage and an attractive layout. My salutations to the editors at Himalayan Academy in Hawaii for continuing to produce such an excellent magazine. I must also say that the

special report by Rajiv Malik on the new Swaminarayan Akshardham *mandir* along the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi is superb (“Pride of India,” Apr/May/Jun, 2006). The two-page spread of this sublime beauty in pink sandstone is just stunning. This picture-feature has so inspired me that I have decided to visit Delhi this year to have darshan of this new temple in the Indian metropolis.

KRISHAN DUTT
LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

A Job Well Done

I READ YOUR MAGAZINE REGULARLY, AND I find it very interesting. I would like to congratulate you for your consistent, professional publications. The views of some saints are very interesting, and it shows they are well aware of what's happenings around the world. Your organization is doing a magnificent job in carrying out your mission. It's time similar organizations follow your footsteps. Once again, congratulations on a job well done.

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Acharya Sabha Conference

MOTHER MAYA SENDS LOVE AND WANTS you to know that we are all so very touched by the wonderful coverage in **HINDUISM TODAY** on Sri Pujya Swami Dayananda's Acharya Sabha Conference 2005 (“To Be a United Voice for Hinduism,” Apr/May/Jun, 2006). The *sadhakas* here are especially thankful for the magnificent darshana photo

of Pujya Swamiji that you provided.

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Portrayal of Christianity

THE BOOK “GOD AGAINST THE GODS” (“what if Rome's Pagan Religion Had Prevailed?” Jan/Feb/Mar, 2006) appears to present its subject in a very one-sided and partly incorrect way. Unfortunately, the review does not point out any of these flaws, but shows Christianity as a cruel, intolerant religion. There are undoubtedly ugly faces of Christianity, but the excerpts from the book quoted in the review conceal and distort facts to such an extent that Christianity appears as a mere monster, which it is not, whereas polytheistic religions appear as all-tolerant, which they may not be either. One could expect a good book review to take an objective and, if necessary, critical position, which unfortunately did not happen in this case.

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Treatment of Divine Imagery

I READ WITH GREAT INTEREST THE STORIES on Hindu reactions to unauthorized printings of paintings of Gods and Goddesses on shoes, handbags and billboards (“Whisky Maker Apologizes for Billboard,” Hindu Press International, Feb. 17, 2006). The reactions are somewhat justified and seem to serve the purpose of ahimsa, being nonviolent, unlike our Islamic neighbors.

However, I would like to pose this question: The Hindu community is virtually besieged with the printing of Gods and Goddesses, by Hindus, on many different items, e.g. incense boxes, flags, cloth, towels, calendars, toys, etc. Many of these originate in India and are brought to the West for consumption. We don't seem to assign the same level of respect to these items as we did to the Paris-made shoes, which invariably end up in washing machines or are disposed of unceremoniously in garbage bins. There is a significant level of tolerable hypocrisy in our own Hindu communities and a great outcry when others attempt to utilize the public paintings in similar fashion. Why?

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Correction

✓ *The land for the New Delhi Akshardham temple was purchased from the government, not donated to BAPS by the government, as incorrectly stated in our Apr/May/Jun, 2006, issue, “Pride of India.”*

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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Jumping the language barrier:
Brahmachari Satya Subramanian (center), from Brazil and fluent in Italian, sits with Hinduism Today editors to review a text translated into Italian and destined to be linked into the digital edition.

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QUOTES & QUIPS

Your duty is to treat everybody with love,
as a manifestation of the Lord.

Swami Sivananda (1887-1963), founder of Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

Once a British author named Stuart wrote a book about Ramana Maharshi after living in his ashram. Some disciples of the saint wrote to him seeking a donation for the ashram in view of the substantive income he received from the book. This brought about the coarse aspect of Stuart's character: "I had thought of you people as being very dedicated and sincere. Now, after receiving your letter, I am going to write a book against you." This was a shocking indictment for the calm and peaceful community of young *brahmacharis*. Maharshi expressed his disapproval of the request for a donation and sent a letter to Stuart. He wrote, "I am very pleased by your plan to write a book against me. You will be doing me a service, something within a short month which we would have failed to achieve during a lifetime of effort. Followers come and go like the leaves of a tree with

the changing seasons, and it is difficult to judge their essential nature. When spring approaches, the tree sheds its leaves and draws upon its vital roots to bring forth healthy, new leaves. I shall be beholden to you for bringing to us such a spring of life. If any permission from our side is needed for publishing the book, it is granted herewith. In case you are beset with any financial difficulty therein, please apprise me of it and we will fund-raise for you through subscriptions." How the author responded is not known.

I wish there was a knob on the TV to turn up the intelligence. There's a knob called brightness, but it doesn't work. **Swami Anubhavananda**, humorous author, lecturer

Books are the way the dead talk to the living. Violence is the diplomacy of the incompetent. Do not speak quickly; it is

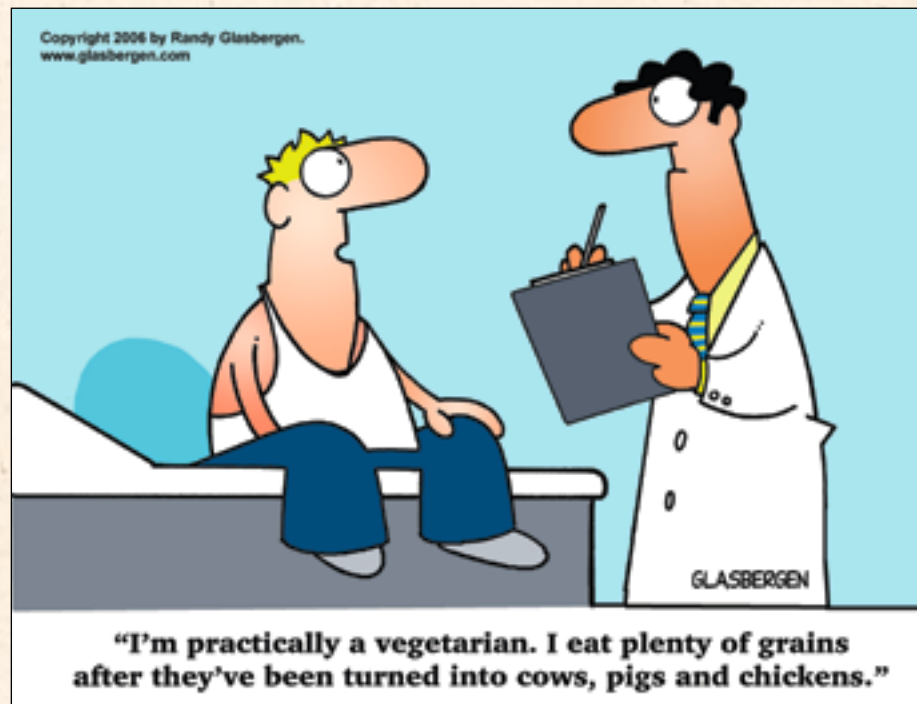
a sign of insanity. There is no sin greater than ignorance. **Pramukh Swami Maharaj**, spiritual head of Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Puroshottam Swaminarayan Sanstha

Good thoughts are the foundation stones in the mansion of good conduct. If the foundation is strong, the mansion will endure. **Sri Rameshbhai Oza**, inspired performer of Vaishnava kathas

It cannot be seen by the eye, and yet it is the eye within the eye. It cannot be heard by the ear, and yet it is the ear within the ear. It cannot be smelt by the nose, and yet it is that which makes the nose to smell. It cannot be uttered by the mouth, and yet it is that which makes the mouth to speak. It cannot be grasped by the hand, and yet it is that which makes the hand to grasp. It cannot be reached by the feet, and yet it is that which makes the feet to walk. It cannot be thought by the mind, and yet it is the mind within the mind. It is the Primal One without past or future. Its form is free from age and sickness. It manifests as father and mother. It blossoms as the Self-Existent. It cannot be described as one or two. No artist can portray It. It is That which lies 'twixt good and evil. It ever abides in the hearts of the wise. It permits no distinction between Vedanta and Siddhanta. It is That which dances at the zenith beyond the realm of sound. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872-1964), Sri Lanka's most renowned contemporary spiritual master

If evil is spoken of you and it's true, do something about it. If untrue, ignore it.

I have nothing new to teach the world, Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)



BASICS OF HINDUISM

Karma, the Natural Law

KARMA LITERALLY MEANS "DEED" or "act" and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter.

Karma is not fate, for man acts with free will, creating his own destiny. The *Vedas* tell us, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we

will reap evil. Karma refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future.

It is the interplay between our experience and how we respond to it that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating. The conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction.



According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action. **Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad** 4.4.5

Hinduism was organized for peaceful and harmonious coexistence, not for continued confrontation with external enemies in the shape of unbelievers. It is no accident of history that, though Hinduism knew internal feuds like any social polity, it never crossed its borders to wage wars against people simply because they worshiped different Gods. Organized on such

nonmilitary principles, there is no wonder that Hinduism did not even have a name for itself. **Ram Swarup** (1920-1998), foremost spokesperson of Hindu spirituality and culture in India

If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one? **Abraham Lincoln** (1809-1865), sixteenth president of the United States

The beef industry has contributed to more American deaths than all the wars of this century, all natural disasters and all automobile accidents combined. If beef

is your idea of "real food for real people," you'd better live real close to a real good hospital. **Neal D. Barnard**, medical doctor, author and president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

Do not resist change. Accept change as one of the prerequisites in your life to spiritual illumination. A positive mental attitude overlooks many things that happen and sees the overall picture of what is progressing in your life. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

DID YOU KNOW?

Ancient India Produced the First Dentists

ACCORDING TO THE *New York Times*, man's first-known trip to the dentist occurred as early as 9,000 years ago, when at least nine people living in a Neolithic village in ancient India had holes drilled into their molars. The findings, reported in the scientific review *Nature*, push back the dawn of dentistry by 4,000 years to around 7000 BC.

The drilled molars come from a sample of 300 individuals buried in graves at

the Mehrgarh site in what is now western Pakistan, believed to be the oldest Stone Age complex in the Indus River valley. "This is certainly the first case of drilling a person's teeth," said David Frayer, professor of anthropology at the University of Kansas. "But even more significant, this practice lasted some 1,500 years and was a tradition at this site. It wasn't just a sporadic event."

Most of the drilling was done on the chewing sur-

faces of their molars, probably using a flint point attached to a bow that made a high-speed drill, the researchers say. Concentric ridges carved by the drilling device were found inside the holes.

Dental health was poor at Mehrgarh, though the problems were less often tooth decay than brutal wear and tear. Roberto Macchiarelli, professor of paleoanthropology at the University of Poitiers, France, attributed



the bad teeth to the Neolithic diet, which included newly domesticated wheat and barley. "A lot of abrasive mineral material was introduced when grains were ground on a stone," Professor Macchiarelli said, "and as these people moved to a grain diet, their teeth wore down."



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FROM THE VEDAS

Who Is a True Brahmin?

Scriptures declare that only a realized soul can claim to be a brahmin

INDIA'S CASTE SYSTEM CAN BE SEEN AS A CODIFICATION of social classes found in any human society. Whether the late development of the jati system (wherein caste is determined by birth) along with related social injustice and abuse, should be attributed to Hindu religion or seen as a purely social phenomenon is a hot topic. Our scriptures have a clear answer. Listen now to the *Vajrasuchi Upanishad*, which, along with other ancient texts, states unambiguously: membership in the priestly brahmin, or brahmana, caste is determined by character, conduct and attainment, not by birth.

I shall describe the *Vajrasuchi* doctrine which blasts ignorance, condemns those who are devoid of the divine knowledge and exalts those endowed with the eye of knowledge.

The *brahmana*, the *kshatriya*, the *vaishya* and the *sudra* are the four castes. That the *brahmana* is the chief among these classes is in accord with the Vedic texts and is affirmed by the *Smritis*. Here there is a point worthy of investigation. Who is, verily, the *brahmana*? Is he the individual soul? Is he the body? Is he the class based on birth? Is he knowledge? Is he the deeds (previous, present or prospective)? Is he the performer of the rites?

To assume that the *jiva*, or the individual soul, is *brahmana*, it is not so, for the individual's form is one and the same in the large number of previous and prospective bodies. Even though the *jiva* is one, it assumes many bodies due to the stress of (past) karma, and in all these bodies the form of the *jiva* is one and the same. Therefore the *jiva* is not the *brahmana*.

If it is said that the body is the *brahmana*, it is not so, because of the sameness of the nature of the body which is composed of the five elements, in all classes of human beings down to the *chandalas* (outcastes), etc.; on account of the perception of the common features of old age and death, virtue and vice. Therefore the body is not the *brahmana*.

If it is said that birth makes the *brahmana*, it is not so, for there are many species among creatures, other than human, many sages are of diverse origin. We hear from the sacred books that Rsyasringa was born of a deer, Kaushika of *kusha* grass, Jambuka from a jackal, Valmiki from an ant-hill, Vyasa from a fisher girl, Gautama from the back of a hare, Vasistha from Urvasi (the celestial nymph), Agastya from an earthen jar. Despite their birth, there are many sages who have taken the highest rank, having given proof of their wisdom. Therefore birth does not make a *brahmana*.

If it is said that knowledge makes a *brahmana*, it is not so, because among *kshatriyas* and others there are many who have seen the highest Reality and attained wisdom. Therefore knowledge does not make a *brahmana*.

Then if it is said that work makes a *brahmana*, it is not so, for we see that the work commenced in the present embodiment or accumulated during the previous or to commence on a future embodiment is common to all living creatures and that good men perform works impelled by their past karma. Therefore work does not make a *brahmana*.

Then if it is said that the performer of religious duties is a *brahmana*, it is not so, for there have been many *kshatriyas* and others who have given away gold—a religious duty. Therefore the per-



NANDHINI NAGARATNAM

Conscious that it is God who sustains him, the good soul cares for the other creatures of the Earth, the hallmark of a true brahmana

former of religious rites is not the *brahmana*.

Then who, verily, is the *brahmana*? He who, after directly perceiving, like the *amalaka* fruit in the palm of one's hand, the Self—with-out a second, devoid of distinctions of birth, attribute and action, devoid of all faults such as the six infirmities, and the six states, of the form of truth, wisdom, bliss and eternity, that is by itself, devoid of determinations, the basis of endless determinations, who functions as the indwelling spirit of all beings, who pervades the interior and the exterior of all, like ether, of the nature of bliss, indivisible, immeasurable, realisable only through one's experience and who manifests himself directly (as one's self)—and, through the fulfilment of his nature, becomes rid of the faults of desire, attachment, etc., and endowed with qualities of tranquillity, etc., rid of the states of being, spite, greed, expectation, bewilderment, etc., with his mind unaffected by ostentation, self-sense and the like, he lives. He alone, who is possessed of these qualities, is the *brahmana*. This is the view of the Vedic texts and tradition, ancient lore and history. The accomplishment of the state of the *brahmana* is otherwise impossible. Meditate on Brahman, the Self who is being, consciousness and bliss, without a second; meditate on Brahman, the Self who is being, consciousness and bliss without a second. This is the *Upanishad*.

SAMA VEDA, VAJRASUCIKA UPANISHAD 1-9
TRANSLATED BY DR. S. RADHAKRISHNAN

DR. S. RADHAKRISHNAN (1888-1975), born in Tamil Nadu, world-renowned philosopher, statesman and President of India, was a gifted and prolific commentator on Hindu philosophy.

The *Vedas* are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, *sruti*, of Hinduism, likened to the *Torah* (1,200 BCE), *Bible New Testament* (100 CE), *Koran* (630 CE) or *Zend Avesta* (600 BCE). Four in number, *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*, the *Vedas* include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 BCE.

FIRE

ON THE MOUNTAIN



A humble servant: A fisherman is chosen to light the ceremonial flame atop Arunachala

Worshipping Lord Siva In a Celebration of Light

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, BANGALORE

THE ALL-PERVADING QUIET OF EARLY morning is suddenly disrupted by a mad clamor of thunderous sound. Ringing bells, pounding drums and piercing *nagaswarams* (temple horns) almost overpower the belting voices of hundreds of devotees who are singing songs in praise of Siva, the Lord of Arunachala. It is 4:30 AM on the 14th of December, 2005, and the small main sanctum of the massive Tiruvannamalai Siva temple in Tamil Nadu is packed with souls who have been waiting in line all night for this moment.

The chief priest has just finished a simple ritual called *bharani dipam* and now ceremoniously waves a huge camphor flame in the direction of nearby Arunachala mountain. Although he is chanting Sanskrit *slokas*, he cannot be heard amidst the deafening furor of devotion that surrounds him. Finally, he touches the flame he is holding to the wicks of five huge, earthen, ghee-filled pots, representing the sacred elements earth, air, fire, water and ether. As these five flames loom up with red-yellow light, the famous, one-day, South Indian festival of Krittika Dipam officially begins.

I am here with my mom, my dad and my aunt. As ardent Hindus, we are all enjoying ourselves immensely and worshipping fully. My father is 80. Generally, he stays away from crowds. For him, a group of five is a lot of people. Yet, when I invited him to come with me on this pilgrimage, he accepted without hesitation.

A most holy site: South India's famous Tiruvannamalai Siva temple with Arunachala mountain looming in the background



The infinite God: Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma worship Lord Siva as a column of light that extends, both up and down, into infinity

A Legend of Fire

The popular Hindu festival of Krittika Dipam is inextricably connected to an ancient Hindu legend recorded in an important Hindu literary work entitled *Skanda Puranam*. According to this story, two Hindu Gods—Lord Brahma, the creator, and Lord Vishnu, the preserver—each claimed superiority over the other. Somewhat embarrassed that distinguished Gods of the celestial realm should be engaged in such a puerile altercation, Lord Siva, the Lord of the Universe, appeared before them as a pillar of fire, known as *sthanu* or *lingodbhavamurti* in Sanskrit. In an effort to somehow ameliorate their discord, He boomed forth in a deep voice, “Whosoever should find either the beginning or the end of this light of mine shall be considered, now and forever more, the superior of you two. Let this be true.”

Upon hearing this, Vishnu took the form of a boar and dug into the depths of the Earth, seeking the beginning of the light. Alas, he returned disappointed. Brahma became a swan and flew up and up, seeking the light’s end. He, too, was about to

give up in despair when, by chance, he happened upon a falling flower that, amazingly, started talking to him.

The flower—a *pandanus odoratissimus*, commonly known as a screw pine—asked the God what in the world he was doing flying up so high. Brahma replied that he was seeking the end of Siva’s light but had been thus far unsuccessful in finding it. Upon hearing this, the screw pine—not knowing the light had no beginning or end—delightedly struck upon a mischievous plan: They could tell Siva they found the end of the light and be each other’s witness to the fact. Brahma liked the idea and so they returned and reported their story.

Siva, of course, was upset. He had no patience with liars. Hence, He decided and so decreed that Brahma and the flower should be provided a lesson in humility, by which they might learn the error of their ways. Lord Brahma, He proclaimed, would not be deified in temples, and the screw pine would never be used in worship. This has indeed come to pass. There are no Brahma temples (except for one), and nobody ever worships with screw pine flowers. It goes without saying that Vishnu was

judged superior to Brahma.

There is an epilogue to this story, which applies specifically to Arunachala mountain. Lord Siva was so upset with Brahma and the flower that he was scorching all three worlds with the roaring flames of His righteous indignation. Finally, the celestials asked Him to stop. Siva obliged by cooling down and manifesting as Arunachala mountain. Both Brahma and Vishnu prayed to Siva that He take the form of a lingam on the east side of the mountain and, in remembrance of His own blazing fire, appear as a light, further up toward the top, each year on the Hindu holy day of Krittika Dipam. Lord Siva granted this prayer.

Today, the 2,682-foot-high Arunachala mountain is actually regarded by many as Tejo Lingam, Lord Siva as a pillar of fire. Some even say that the traditional worship of the Siva Lingam, as it is currently practiced throughout India and around the world, commenced on Arunachala. The eight-mile circuit around the base of the mountain is itself a pilgrimage destination. Along its way are more than 360 *tirthams* (holy tanks) and 400 lingams. Ramana Maharshi’s ashram is situated on this circuit, making it all the more famous.

I am also attending this sacred event as a correspondent for HINDUISM TODAY. In that capacity, I am ever at the ready for a good quote. As soon as the *bharani dipam* concludes, I approach a very official looking person. With one finger poised on the “start”-button of my handy, pocket-size tape recorder, I introduce myself and begin an informal conversation. The lady I am talking to tells me her name is Dr. Malathi and that she is a government doctor on duty here in service to devotees attending the festival.

“There is immense significance in this first Krittika Dipam ceremony called *bharani dipam*,” she explains. “At this time, the universal Lord manifests as the five elements, which will later fully merge to become one when the Krittika Dipam flame is lit in the evening. From one to many and many to one. This is the whole essence of Saivism and the meaning of Krittika Dipam.”

All across India, millions of bonfires are lit on hills and in temples on Krittika Dipam. But nowhere is this festival celebrated like it is in Tiruvannamalai, also known as Annamalai, Arunachala, Arunadri and Tiruvarunai—and famous as the home of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Krittika Dipam occurs annually in the lunar month of Kartika, which occurs in November/December, on the last day of the 10-day festival called Brahmotsavam. It is on this auspicious day that, at precisely 6:00 in the evening, a sacred fire is lit on top of the 2,682-foot-high Arunachala mountain to symbolize the merging of all manifest existence back into the one source of all things. It is said that those who witness this sacred ceremony receive the blessings of Siva and Parvati in person. All of the traditional temple rituals that are performed during Brahmotsavam create a spiritual fervency that culminates with great power on Krittika Dipam as a grand

congregation of devotees, holy men, officials, police personnel and media squeeze together, shoulder to shoulder, to witness the festival’s magnificent consummation.

“Preparations for this holy day begin one month in advance with the local administration, revenue department, police and temple authorities synergizing their efforts,” says Mr. Jayram, deputy commissioner of Tiruvannamalai. “It’s not an easy task managing tens of millions of people. Even a small lapse can be very costly. It is God who guides us and gives us the strength we need. We endeavor to see that we give our best to those who come seeking Arunachala.”

Since early morning, temple staff and volunteers have been carrying five-gallon containers of ghee and large pots of thick, braided cloth wicks to the top of Arunachala mountain. Once the mountaintop flame has been lit, it must be kept burning for ten days, which requires vast quantities of wick and clarified butter.

As the day wanes into dusk and night begins to darken the sky, pilgrims stand or sit, motionless with anticipation, at the base of Arunachala mountain, preparing to worship God Siva as an infinite pillar of light (See sidebar: A

Legend of Fire).

At 6 PM, a roaring fire is ignited in the temple at the base of Arunachala. This signals the lighting of a similar blaze on the summit. When that flame is seen by the thousands of devotees below, the entire countryside explodes with flashing luminescence. Bonfires, lamps, neon lights and fireworks light the night like day as a surging, thronging, emotionally charged mass of devotees chant, “Arunachala Siva,” “Annamalai” and “Annamalai Harohara.”

Long-time pilgrims assert that, even years later, the very thought of an otherworldly moment like this recreates it, just as if it is happening fresh and new. I can certainly say with full assurance that it is not an experience I will ever forget. No words in any language—spoken, whispered or thought—could ever express even a hint of the intense spirituality I felt right then and there in the middle of that perfect devotion.

Through my eyes only

Although Tiruvannamalai is only a five-hour drive from Bangalore, where I live, I have never been

The moment of magic: At 6 PM on Krittika day, a flame lit in Tiruvannamalai temple signals the lighting of another fire atop Mount Arunachala. (Inset) The temple flame, fully ablaze.





two days, thanks to the caring hospitality of Sri Jayendra Puri Swamiji (See sidebar: Heir to the Throne). Due to a shortage of accommodations, many people are literally living on the streets, finding shelter wherever they can. Even the hundreds of ashrams in this holy town are full.

Internationally renowned photographer Thomas Kelly—also on assignment for HINDUISM TODAY—is working with me on this story. He arrived before me and is already snapping photos with great enthusiasm and inspiration. When we first connect, he is bubbling with excitement at the abundant photographic opportunities that have already come his way. After he gives me a quick update of what he has done thus far, we set off together to explore new festival adventures.

The devotees around us are firmly focused and seem to know exactly what they are doing. Although many of them do not live here, few are first-time pilgrims like Thomas and me. Still, their faces betray a newcomer's fresh sense of anticipation. All day long, devotees have been climbing Arunachala just to touch the vessel that will hold the flame that will be lit that evening.

"They look like ants on a march," exclaimed Thomas, pointing to the continuous stream of people trekking up the slopes. Ah, yes! Another photo opportunity. In a flash, he is capturing the scene on camera. Although devotees are discouraged from climbing the mountain because it is said to be Lord Siva incarnate, thousands still scale the slopes unabashedly on Krittika Dipam.

The chosen fishermen

A flame taken from the five earthen pots that were lit just after the early morning temple



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

At the cauldron: Devotees clamor to touch the vessel that will hold the krittika dipam on the mountaintop

ceremony of *bharani dipam* is kept burning in the temple throughout the day as a symbol of the merging of manifestation back into God, the one source of all. This single flame is referred to as the *bharani dipam*. At 10:00 in the morning, a select group of fishermen are blessed by the temple priest with a small ceremony. At this time—amidst ringing bells and temple music—the priest gives the fishermen a lamp that has been lit from

the *bharani dipam* in the temple. This lamp, also called *bharani dipam*, will be taken by the fishermen to the top of the mountain.

Local fishermen are traditionally given the privilege of carrying the *bharani dipam* up the mountain and lighting the *krittika dipam* in the evening, because—according to a popular myth—Parvati (the wife of Lord Siva) was born in a fishing village. "There are around 75 fishing families that are bestowed with this hereditary privilege," explains Saravana, a young fisherman who lives nearby. "Three of them carry the *dipam*. Each year, the duty rotates. There is never infighting amongst those who share this duty. The elders decide."

After their consecration ritual, the fishermen take off up the mountain. Their hike up the steep, rugged slopes will take about four hours. They take their sacred task seriously, never losing sight of the fact that the flame they carry will be seen by thousands as the eternal light of Lord Siva.

After photographing the pujas in the temple, Thomas—an experienced mountaineer—takes off barefoot up the hill, hunched forward under the considerable weight of his large, heavy camera bags (See sidebar, page 24: OK, I Can Do This). He moves quickly to keep up with the fishermen, who are waiting for no one. It was not exactly our plan that Thomas would go up the mountain at this time, but he is moving on inspiration, and I don't want to impede



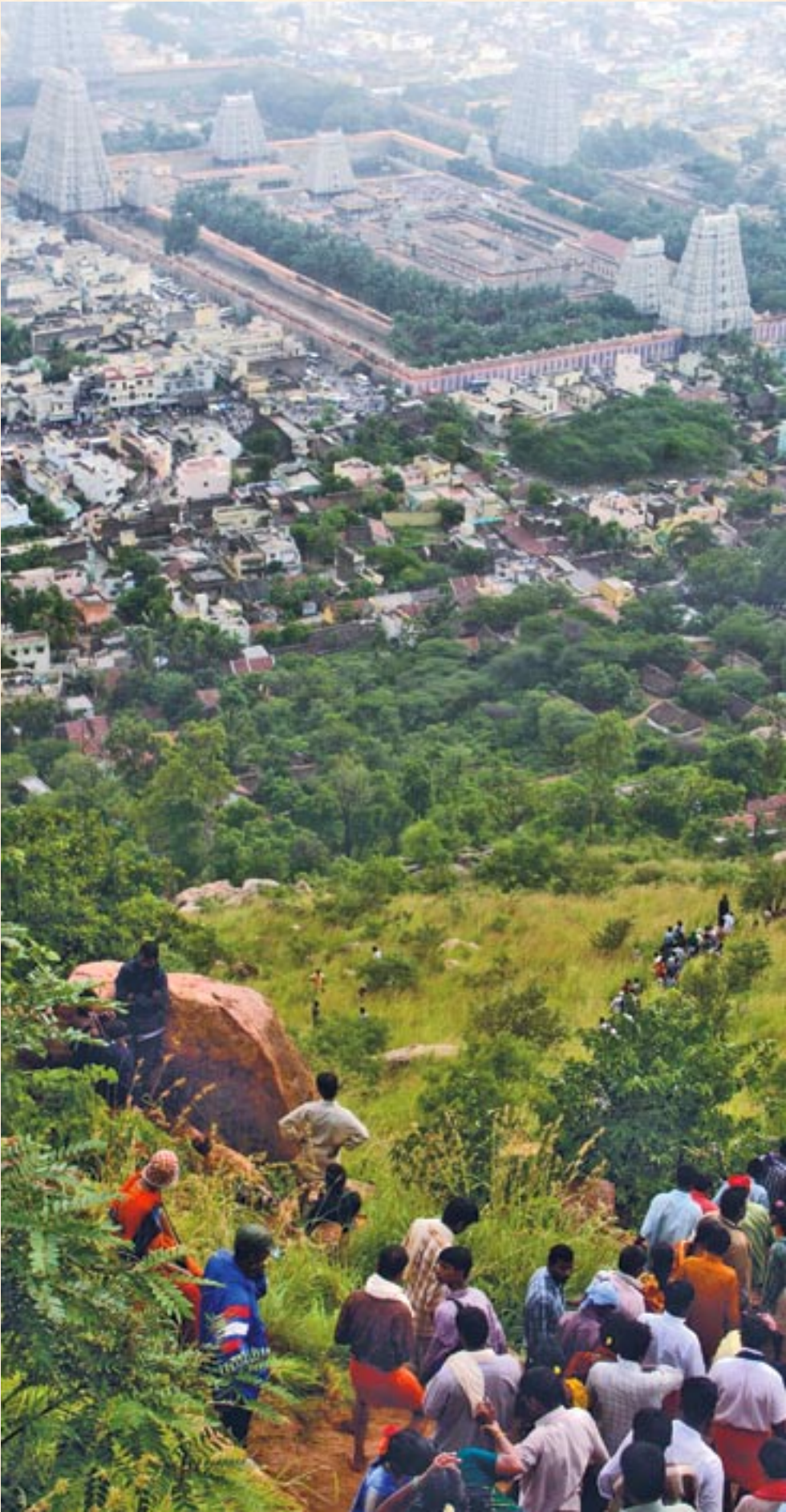
An Historic Temple

THE 1,300-YEAR-OLD ARUNACHALA Siva temple of Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, with its giant, 217-foot *gopurams* (entrance towers), is India's second largest temple and one of its most sought-after pilgrimage destinations. Great South Indian kings—including Rajaraja Chola, Rajendra Chola, Harihara Bukkar, Krishna Deva Rayar, as well as the kings of the Chera, Pallava, Pandya, Rashtrakotta, Hoysala and Naik dynasties—were proud to have this sanctuary within their kingdom boundaries.

Historical details about it are revealed in stone inscriptions on the walls and copper plates of the temple itself. These inscriptions, which refer to a period of time spanning a thousand years, starting from 750 CE, indicate that the greatness of this holy, pilgrimage destination was made known to the kings of the times, primarily through important South Indian devotional literature like the *Thevaram* and *Thiruvagasam*.

Aruna means "force" and *achala* means "that which cannot be moved." Thus, the Arunachaleswarar Temple represents Lord Siva as an indomitable, unmovable power. This special Siva temple is located 125 miles from Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu.

Its day-to-day administration is currently controlled by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department of the Tamil Nadu Government.



From the holy mountain: The vast Tiruvannamalai Siva temple as viewed from the base of Arunachala Mountain and (right) from a vantage point near its summit



him.

In the temple, all is quiet after the fishermen leave. The rains continue. No one cares. Everyone is engrossed in preparing for the coming evening. Some wait to enjoy entertaining events scheduled for the afternoon. The festival administration is busy making seating and security arrangements in and around the temple for the scores of VIP guests—politicians, film stars, senior court judges, bureaucrats and more.

A lot of people are seeking special treatment, but few are getting it. Temple officials are constantly hassled for “festival passes.” Although some devotees just want these tickets so they can snuggle up close to VIPs, others have a better reason. On Krittika Dipam day, the temple is closed after 3 PM to those without passes. Luckily, I have one.

By 5:00 in the evening, the area surrounding the temple flagpole, as well as the adjoining terrace, is packed. Unmindful of the incessant drizzle, people are grabbing seats to observe the dramatic arrival of five exquisitely decorated palanquins, carrying the Hindu Gods Vinayaka, Subramanya, Siva, Amba and Chandikeshwara. The devotees



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

Braids of fire: It is considered a blessing to carry or even touch the thick braided cotton wicks that will be lit on Krittika Dipam

are constantly moving and adjusting their positions to get a better view and to make way for still more people pouring in. Experienced pilgrims know exactly what's going to happen. For first-timers like me, the anticipation is enhanced by a sort of blessed ignorance.

Not wanting to miss even the smallest detail of what is going on and fully determined to perform my duty as a reporter well, I am

constantly dispatching a barrage of questions to people around me. While some of these kindly folks answer me with courteous patience, others find me a distraction and slowly inch away or pretend not to hear.

Suddenly, the crowd's attention shifts to the temple entrance from behind the flag pole. Some devotees jump up to get a better view. The police shout at them to be seated. The first palanquin arrives with a dramatic flair. It's the Vinayaka Deity, a form of Lord Ganesha. Exquisitely bedecked with a variety of flowers artistically arranged, this relatively small Deity seems magically large in its luxurious setting. More than

eight people are carrying the heavy wooden palanquin. They dance with graceful dignity to the accompaniment of temple music, devotional singing and Sanskrit prayers. Soon enough, they reach their designated position in front of the flag pole and come to a stop.

In a few minutes, the next palanquin arrives, as if in competition. It's a little bigger. Unmindful of its weight, those who are car-

rying this celestial cargo somehow manage to dance with abandon, rocking the Deity joyously. I ask the person next to me which Deity this is. “Subramanya,” he snaps impatiently.

No one wants to shift their gaze even for a moment. I'm beginning to think that maybe I had better do the same—otherwise, I might miss something important. I try to get closer to the flag pole, but a policewoman stops me.

Now another palanquin is arriving, rocking to and fro. “Swami, Swami,” the crowd shouts. Here, “Swami” is referring to Siva. Amba (Goddess Parvati) is right behind, followed by Chandikeshwara. I have learned that, when the crowd shifts its gaze, something new and important is about to happen.

Within about 30 minutes, five palanquins have arrived in all their spiritual pageantry. Now, we wait for the climax, the coming of Ardhanarishvara (Lord Siva as half man, half woman). I am told that this will occur immediately after the *krittika dipam* is lit. People are now either stubbornly holding their seated positions or inching forward for

a better vantage point. Everyone wants to be able to see the mountaintop. The drizzle continues. There is a bit of agitated commotion, but it is of little consequence. All eyes are looking up.

Finally, the appointed moment arrives. Against the backdrop of a sunset sky, crowned with the rising star of Kartika,

thundering firecrackers, ringing temple bells and a frenzy of rhythmic chanting merge to create a cacophony of chaotic splendor. Camphor is lit in a cauldron by the temple flag pole, signaling priests on top of the mountain to light their flame. The timing is perfectly synchronized. The air is charged as the overpowering sight of light,



The summit: Within sight of the peak of Arunachala and oblivious to pouring rain, devotees struggle to catch a glimpse of the holy vessel that will contain the sacred Krittika flame



Climbing Arunachala: Devotees volunteer to carry oil and wicks up the mountain behind the Tiruvannamalai temple for the lighting of the flame at 6 pm on Krittika Dipam day. A ton of oil and 1,000 feet of wick will be consumed during the 10 days the fire is kept alive.

OK, I Can Do This!

BY THOMAS KELLY, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

THE FISHERMEN WHO HAVE BEEN chosen to light the Krittika Dipam are all gathered together inside a side shrine adjacent to the main temple. They have just been blessed by the temple priest who now lights the ghee lamp they will carry up Arunachala mountain. To the thundering of drums, they all suddenly rise together to stride quickly out into the main temple courtyard where hundreds of pilgrims are waiting for them. As they make their way out of the temple into the street heading for the trail that leads up the mountain, I think to myself, “Should I follow them and risk not being able to return to the main temple in time to photograph the events that will take place there at 6:00 PM?” I look at my watch. “OK,” I thought, “I can do this.”

I run with my camera gear to catch up with the procession. The main *maagi*, who is carrying the ghee lamp, is moving very quickly. At first, a few of his colleagues stumble behind him with a cluster of pilgrims clumsily striving to keep up. As the progression proceeds, more pilgrims join the march. Soon, there are hundreds. Then

there are thousands.

As we approach the beginning of the climb, I suddenly notice everyone taking off their shoes. This requires some thought, but there isn't much time. Soon enough, off come my Teva sandals.

Pilgrims scramble along the snake-like trail, snatching blessings at various shrines along the way. Storm clouds are gathering rapidly around the mountain's summit. Now we are meeting devotees coming down. There is only one trail and we tangle in a human traffic jam. Miraculously, the *maagis* thread their way through this obstacle as if it is not there.

The rain begins in earnest halfway up the mountain. I don't have an umbrella, and my camera gear is wet. I search anxiously for a plastic bag of some sort to cover my camera. Luckily, I find a man selling popcorn to pilgrims. Before I can ask, he sees my need and gives me an empty bag. I cut a hole in the bottom of it so that my camera lens can stick through enough that I can continue shooting pictures.

The *maagis* have gotten ahead of me. I have to hustle to catch up. After two hours more of continuous walking, we arrive at a resting point within 200 meters of the summit. There is a huge crowd of people already here. Policemen are desperately trying to control and direct many of these people around a precarious rock outcropping, which cannot be avoided by those wanting to reach the summit. It takes all the strength that I can muster just to hoist all of my camera gear over that rock obstacle, but it is worth it. I now have a great

vantage point from which I can take photographs in a number of directions.

The rain is really coming down. Everyone is soaked—yet no one is unhappy. The excitement of having reached the top of the mountain makes it all worthwhile. There isn't much room on the summit. I can see a copper vessel about five feet deep and five feet wide.

All the pilgrims are wanting to touch this sacred container that will hold the Krittika flame. Some are making offerings of ghee into it. I madly snap photos for about 20 minutes, before beginning my descent. My feet are aching from the stone bruises I got coming up. I check my watch and realize that I must now move quickly.

By the time I reach the main temple, it is 5:30 PM.

Pilgrims are everywhere. The main temple entrance is blocked. I am in a panic. How am I going to get in?

I take out my press pass and struggle toward the police who are holding back the crowds. They let me through. With some degree of effort, I reach a balcony in view of the main temple courtyard. From there, I can also see the mountain summit. As the temple fire is lit at 6 PM, the mist on the mountain is just breaking up. The moment is overwhelming. Thousands of pilgrims are chanting “Aum Namasivaya.” I close my eyes briefly to relish the moment. When I open them an instant later, the first sight I see is fire jumping skyward from the top of Arunachala. “Magnificent,” I think to myself as I start clicking shots. “Siva and Parvati are one.”

Photographer/author Thomas Kelly

signifying Siva in the form of Jyoti (divine light), merges with Parvati to become Siva/Sakti. Now, finally, Ardhanarishvara is brought out of the temple with great ceremonial fanfare. This is the only day of the year that this particular Deity is ever moved. It is most auspicious.

The sight of the *krittika dipam* is magical. It brings an inexplicable joy. People are ecstatic, mesmerized by the light. In a moment of complete absorption, I forget myself and lose consciousness of everything and everyone around me. The rain clouds that have intermittently masked the *dipam* now create a diffusion of light and color that produces a most striking effect. Even though this is uniquely beautiful, I am aching for at least one moment of perfect visual clarity so that I can witness the mountaintop flame unobstructed. I shout loudly with impatience, “Arunachala, please remove that cloud for just a moment.” In a jiffy, as if in answer to my plea, the cloud vanishes like a curtain pulled aside. The people nearby look at me in surprise as if to ask, “How did you do that?” Well, that’s Arunachala! My aged parents are standing there with me at this precious time. The glow on their faces betrays their fulfillment and brings me great joy.



No seating room: The colorful festivities prior to the flame lighting in the temple at 6 PM draw record crowds

A few minutes after the *dipam* is lit, the crowds reluctantly and slowly disperse. Yet, the experience is not over. In a sense, it has only just begun. Wherever we all go, we will carry with us the sublime thrill of the divine adventure we have all just shared. The overwhelming aftermath of our exaltation takes a long time to settle down into the reality of routine life. I resolve to return to this holy place again and again.

On Krittika Dipam day, many devotees fast all day, taking food only after the lighting of the sacred fire in the evening. This is the traditional practice of the fishermen who light the *krittika dipam*. “We don’t drink even water the entire day,” says Sent-

hil, one of the fisherman. “Only after returning from the hill late at night do we take *prasadam* (sacred food offering)—and even then, only from the temple.”

Thomas, our photographer, also fasted. To be honest, he really didn’t have a choice. When he followed the fishermen up the hill in the morning, he carried no food or water. Little did he know that his next opportunity to eat or drink anything at all would be only late that night. When I catch up with him in the evening, he is famished. “You have certainly become an ar-

dent devotee of Arunachala,” I tell him jokingly. He laughs. He is happy.

After nightfall, we see groups of people lighting lamps in the streets. Every house, every shop, every temple—not only in Tiruvannamalai but in all surrounding villages and towns—is bedecked with beautifully flickering lamps.

Throughout the day, street merchants have been performing *annadana* (free distribution of food). For this one day, the entire town has merged as one family of unforgettable warmth, amity and cordiality. Even amidst the discomfort of the crowded streets, life runs smoothly and everyone gets along harmoniously. A senior police officer

informs me that there has not been a single instance of misbehavior, theft or crime during the festival.

“Nearly 2,500 police personnel are on duty during the festival,” he explains. “They have been briefed that this is a religious congregation, and devotees should not be harassed or dealt with harshly. Our work has mainly been crowd control.”

When the *dipam* was lit, I saw scores of policemen and policewomen forgetting themselves in devotion as they merged in the experience of Arunachala.

The residents of Tiruvannamalai take great pride in the spiritual heritage of their famously powerful temple town. “I grew up here and never miss a single celebration,” says Dhanalakshmi, who sells coconuts in front of the temple. “See how many people come to see our God here.” She is not disturbed that the crowds attending the temple might place a burden on her small town.

The temple is closed for a day after Krittika Dipam, because it is believed that, when Arunachala manifested Himself in the *dipam*, He temporarily shifted His abode from the temple to the hilltop.

Walking around the mountain

One of many distinctive features at Tiruvannamalai is the custom of *giri pradakshina*, or *girivala*, as it is sometimes called—the eight-



Feeding mendicants: Sri Ramana Maharshi’s busy and thriving ashram, one of many in Tiruvannamalai, provides a daily vegetarian meal to hundreds of local sadhus

Heir to the Throne

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, BANGALORE

NO ONE WHO KNOWS SRI JAYENDRA PURI SWAMI COULD ever doubt that he would be a worthy successor to His Holiness Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal, who attained Mahasamadhi on January 14, 2005. Although Jayendra Puri Swami was officially nominated as the successor to the *pitam* (seat of authority) at Sri Kailash Ashrama Mahasamsthana in Bangalore, India, on December 11, 2003, he has been in charge of the administration of both Tiruchi Swami’s ashram and its adjoining Rajarajeshvari temple since 1993.



Homage to Mahaguru: Sri Jayendra Puri Swami performs puja (worship ceremony) to his guru, Sri Tiruchi Swami

Jayendra Puri was born on October 20, 1960. His family was well respected. His childhood was happy and fulfilling. And he was a bright student at the top of his class. Yet something was missing. “I had experienced a lot of success in life,” explained Swami, “but I felt a strange hollowness. I came from a somewhat modern family, so my first exposure to Hindu scriptures was when I was 27 years old. What was amazing was, when I finally read these scriptures for the first time, it was like I knew them already. They all seemed so very familiar.”

It was then that Jayendra Puri felt inspired to make his way to Kailash Ashrama Mahasamsthana to seek guidance on the divine path from His Holiness Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal. The instant he met the elder swami, he knew immediately that he had found his guru. There was not even a trace of doubt in his mind.

“My aim in life was to attain the Divine Mother in all of her beauty and divinity,” said Sri Jayendra Puri Swami. “I came to Mahaswami in 1987. As soon as I met him, I expressed to him my desire to take *sannyas* (Hindu monastic vows of renunciation). He told me to wait. A month later, he sent me to Haridwar to learn scripture and to be of service to a saint there who was old. Just before I left, he gave me the robes of *brahmacharya* (white robes signifying a vow of celibacy). I lived there for seven-and-a-half years. Early in 1989, before the Allahabad Kumbhmela, I wrote to Mahaswamigal, again seeking initiation into *sannyas*. He finally gave me permission with instructions that my guru in Haridwar should conduct the rituals in his name.”

In Haridwar, Sri Jayendra Puri Swami kept to himself and performed his disciplines well. On completing his duties and study, he returned to Sri Kailash Ashrama Mahasamsthana to serve the Goddess and his guru, His Holiness, Sri Sri Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal.

One of Jayendra Puri’s many special talents is his aptitude for

learning languages. He can speak all the South Indian dialects, as well as Hindi. He is also fluent in German and Italian. “Seeing my flair for languages,” said Swami, “Mahaswamigal arranged for a tutor to come here and teach me Italian in the ashram.”

When His Holiness Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal was asked why he chose Jayendra Puri Swami as his successor, he said, “This man is well educated and sincere. He has a thorough knowledge of the *shastras* and carries on the tradition of the ashram with complete devotion. He is compassionate. He has concern for the poor and works for the welfare of all. He is calm and composed. He understands our *sampradaya* (spiritual lineage).”

After nominating Jayendra Puri Swami as his successor, Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal called together all of the ashram and temple residents, as well as a select group of distinguished devotees, to inform them of his decision. At this time he made it known that proper respects should be paid to his successor, and that all appropriate protocols should be followed. Everyone felt blessed to have witnessed their Guru’s ordination and blessing of his most worthy successor.

I first met Jayendra Puri Swami when I was appointed guardianship of nine small children from Malaysia, who had come to learn scriptures in the Kailash Ashram *gurukula* (priest training school). When he first spoke to me, his sparkling eyes and bright face made me feel like I was in

the presence of an enlightened man.

Through the years since then, my family and I have interacted with Jayendra Puri Swami on many occasions. Each of these experiences left us feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. The ease with which he narrates and quotes from scriptures leaves us spellbound. Under the brilliant stewardship of Jayendra Puri Swami, the high standards of Hindu tradition set by Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal have been raised still higher, and without dilution.

I had the opportunity to stay at Kailash Ashram’s branch in Thiruvannamalai during the Krittika Dipam festival. It was an experience I will always treasure. We were humbled by the hospitality, care and warmth we felt there. My father has always told me, “Never aspire to receive from an ashram or a temple. Seek only to give.” Nevertheless, there we were at Kailash Ashram, seeking nothing, yet receiving all.

Swami was particularly careful in seeing to the needs of my parents. He personally ensured that they experienced no discomfort.

Swami’s personalized care was not confined to my family alone. Everyone who stayed at his ashram was a recipient of his love.

Jayendra Puri Swami is already famous for the special love and care he gives pilgrims and devotees who come under his guardianship. By the example that he sets, he inspires us all toward humility and service.

Sri Jayendra Puri Swami





S. RAJAM

An artist's rendering: S. Rajam portrays Ramana Maharshi with the Tiruvannamalai temple and Arunachala mountain in the background

mile circumambulation of the holy Arunachala mountain. No one knows when this custom began. One of the 1,008 names given to Arunachala by Adi Shankara is Giripradakshinapriya, which means "lover of *giri pradakshina*."

Bhagwan Ramana Maharshi often spoke of the significance of this sacred practice. He performed *giri pradakshina* himself many times. "Do not consider, even for a moment, that Arunachala is merely a hill of rocks and boulders," he cautioned devotees. He offered a unique interpretation of the word *pradakshina* (literally "circumambulation"): "*Pra* stands for 'removal of all sins,' *da* stands for 'fulfilling of desires,' *kshi* stands for 'freedom from future births,' *na* stands for 'deliverance received through jnana.'"

The attitude of the people coming here, even during non-festival times, is strikingly focused. Completely unmindful of formalities and protocols, most of them could not care less about VIPs who might also be visiting. They also seem oblivious to inconveniences or discomforts of any sort. These rare pilgrims wait patiently in long queues for hours, just for an instant of eye contact with their precious Lord. And they will perform *giri pra-*

dakshina in the worst of weather.

Giri pradakshina is best performed early in the morning, on a day when the sun is just rising behind Arunachala, yielding the subtle pastels of daybreak. Eight temples, constructed to face in the four primary and four secondary directions, constitute important stops for the devotee as he treads the path around the holy mountain. There are also many other temples to visit along the way. This journey is traditionally performed barefooted, starting at Ramanashram. It is considered especially auspicious to perform this holy practice on *purnima* (full moon day), when the crowd is said to be as massive as during Krittika Dipam.

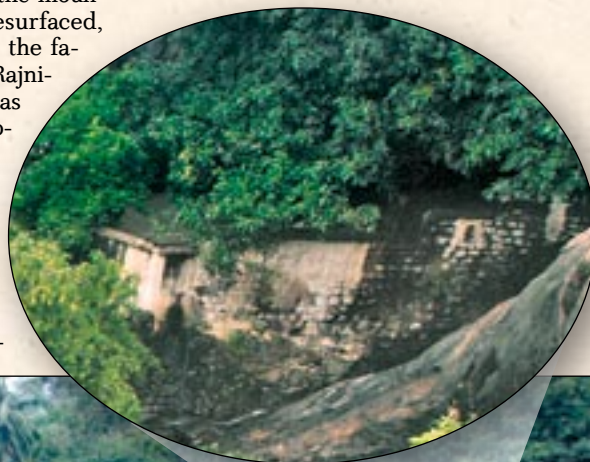
The entire road around the mountain has been recently resurfaced, thanks to a donation from the famous Tamil movie actor, Rajnikant. Locals tell me he has contributed immensely toward the development of Tiruvannamalai.

There is a strong belief that prayers will be answered when *giri pradakshina* is performed. This conviction has increased the number of visitors to this holy place consid-

erably. Yet, sincere devotees strive to maintain a selfless purity in their worship by not seeking personal reward. "*Girivala* should be done on foot and with devotion. Then, automatically, Arunachala will answer your prayers. He knows what you need. Performing this act with a motive dilutes devotion," asserts Mani, a local auto driver.

I could not stay away

I performed the *giri pradakshina* when I returned to Arunachala, one week after Krittika Dipam. This time I came with my husband and children. As we entered the town at two in the morning, we eagerly looked for the *dipam* atop the mountain. Nothing was visible. Suddenly, my daughter spotted the fire, flickering daintily. For hours, we stayed up watching the divine flame. It was sup-



THOMAS KELLY

Hermitage: Bhagwan Ramana Maharshi spent a year absorbed in yogic contemplation in the cave here known as Skandashram. Tucked away in the jungle foliage at the base of the mountain, the hut built out from the cave (magnified inset) is still accessible.

posed to have burnt out on the previous day, yet there it was—still burning.

We started our *giri pradakshina* just before dawn. It was beautiful. Yes, my feet did hurt and there were pebbles and thorns, but the trek was certainly not tiring. Elderly pilgrims, even people with disabilities, were walking without too much difficulty. They took their time, and their devotion was exemplary.

During the 10 days that the flame burns on Arunachala after Krittika Dipam, it consumes a ton of ghee and 1,000 feet of thick, cotton wick. The fishermen who have been chosen to light the *dipam* hike up the mountain every day to restock the cauldron and keep the flame alive. They consider their task a sacred privilege.

A month after the celebration has ended they perform fire-walking to absolve themselves of any sins they have accrued by setting foot on the mountain while carrying the *dipam*. They also arrange for special pu-

jas (worship ceremonies), *abhisheka* (water ceremonies) and *homas* (fire ceremonies) to be performed in their names.

Countless holy men—including Agasthya, Brighu, Valmiki, Vyasa, Narada, Apasthambha, Vashistha, Sambandar, Guhai Namasivayar, Manikyavachagar, Arunagirinathar, Seshadri Swamigal, Siva Yogaswami and Sivaya Subramuniyaswami—have received divine inspiration in this holy place. Illumined saints and sages, most notably Bhagwan Ramana Maharshi, have made Arunachala their home. That these great souls lived and influenced so many is proof of the power of a spirituality that is unknown to many of us who spend so much time absorbed in the problems of everyday life. I can say from my own experience that anyone who makes a pilgrimage to Tiruvannamalai at any time will come away feeling completely recharged, cleansed and born anew.



The author: Choodie Shivram has been a journalist for 25 years. She holds a BA degree and a full law degree. She resides in Bangalore with her husband and two children.

HINDUISM TODAY

The Silent Sage of Peace

WHEN THE LEGENDARY INDIAN SAGE, SRI RAMANA Maharshi, attained *mahasamadhi* at the age of 70 on April 14, 1950 in Tiruvannamalai, witnesses saw a bright shooting star moving toward the holy mountain of Arunachala. Such an auspicious event was the perfect culmination to a life so quietly powerful in its enduring spiritual influence, even beyond the shores of India.

"A conscious bliss ensues when one abides as the Self," he told his devotees. "Inquire: 'What is the true import of I?' The bliss of That is spontaneous, indestructible and limitless."

English novelist and playwright Somerset Maugham pilgrimaged to visit the sage in 1938. When he entered the ashram after the tiring journey, he fainted and was taken to a hut where he remained unconscious for some time. When he opened his eyes, Ramana Maharshi was sitting by his bed. "He bore himself with naturalness and at the same time with dignity," the famous author later wrote. "His mien was cheerful, smiling, polite. His eyes with a gentle benignity rested on my face. His body was absolutely still. He said, 'Silence is also conversation.'"

Ramana Maharshi was born with the name Venkataraman in Tirucculi near Madurai in South India. His father died when he was 12. At that time, he was sent to live with his uncle in Madurai where he attended school, played with friends, swam in the village lake and frequently won in games of competition that he played with local neighborhood boys. Even as a child, he was religiously devout—yet open-minded. One of his closest friends was a Muslim named Sab Jan. "God's creation is alike," he told his friend. "There is no differentiation in creation. God is the same. The apparent differences in God are created by men."

One day, when Venkataraman was alone in his home, the fear of death overwhelmed him. He explained, "The shock drove my mind inwards, and I said to myself mentally 'Now death has come. What

does it mean?' I dramatized the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs outstretched stiff, as in rigor mortis, and imitated a corpse. 'Well then,' I said to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be carried to the burning ground and burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am I dead? Is the body I?' " Suddenly the fear of death vanished, and he became absorbed in the Self.

Shortly after that, he pilgrimaged to the great Siva temple in Tiruvannamalai at the base of Arunachala Hill. There he found a cave, sat in meditation and entered a trance-like state. Day by day, his austerities intensified. His absorption was so deep that ants ate into his skin, leaving scars that would be visible throughout his life. When his uncle, Nellaiappan, finally found him a year later, Venkataraman could neither speak nor hear. Nellaiappan notified the boy's mother, who soon arrived to help nurse him back to good health. She lived with him for the rest of her life in the ashram that Ramana Maharshi established following his famous austerities.

Today that ashram is still a living, thriving place. Although it is located on the edge of town, it is a world unto itself, comprised of a temple, a meditation hall, library, large dining hall with excellent food, gardens, peacocks and lots of guest cottages. A free mid-day meal is served to the local holy men.

Ramana Maharshi taught a method called self-inquiry, in which the seeker focuses continued attention on the I-thought in order to find its source. Those who have practiced this method testify that in the beginning, a relentless effort of concentration is necessary. Yet eventually, long-term consistency yields a blissful sense of oneness as the mind dissolves into the heart center.

Although Ramana Maharshi left no formal successor, his teachings today guide thousands around the world. Some read his books and visit his ashram; others follow one of several teachers who perpetuate his wisdom. "The mind is a form of energy," said the sage. "It manifests as the world. When the mind sinks into the Self, then the Self is realized; when the mind issues forth, the world appears and the Self is not realized."

HINDUISM TODAY

Passing on Our Way of Life

What concerned Hindu moms across America are doing to transmit endangered religious, cultural and linguistic traditions to their children

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

FOR HINDU CHILDREN WHO GROW UP in India, their religion is all around them. It resounds from the bells of their neighborhood temple, in the stories told by grandparents and in the countless rituals and ceremonies that are a part of daily life in India. Living in a country that is more than 80 percent Hindu, they absorb their religion by osmosis, surrounded by large, loving extended families, by colorful festivals and holidays that permeate the seasons. The Hindu way of life wafts in the very air they breathe.

But what about Hindu children born in fast-moving America, where there are few markers of Indian life? Religion and culture are best absorbed in childhood, yet these children do not see Hindu culture echoed in the world around them, especially if they live in Smalltown, USA, where there may be few people who look or worship like them.

Well, now there's good news for such families: they are not alone. A number of enterprising women—all of them mothers—have created innovative ways to pass on language and culture to American-born Indian children.

Meenal Pandya, a writer and consultant, has brought up two daughters in Massachusetts and successfully taught them about their religion and culture. She has written several popular books about Indian culture, including children's books on Holi and Diwali. But especially valuable to Indian parents is *The Indian Parenting Book: Imparting Your Cultural Heritage to the Next Generation*. In it, she points out that Indian culture has evolved around the Hindu way of life that is based on three principles: all creation is one family; every life is potentially divine; and there are many different paths to arrive at the same truth. "Cultural parenting is, in essence, helping your next generation on the path of this journey," she says. "On a more practical level, it is what you teach your children, how you teach your children and what you emphasize in your own life. Every act of a parent becomes a learning process and creates a cultural imprint for the child."

For those struggling to impart Indian culture to their children in a new country without the help of extended family, the



Culture bound: (above) Students at the Young Indian Cultural Group at a rehearsal of the Ramayana and (below) in a group picture with the founder, Rathi Raja (center)



PHOTOS: COURTESY RATHI RAJA



Literary route: (left) Monika Jain (left) and Leena Chawla with their South Asian literary magazine for children, *Kahani*, (above)

where they learned firsthand the value of different Indian spices to their health and looks—a much more compelling way to make them eat their food! She also suggests cooking meals when the children are around, rather than away

at school, so that they can participate and the spices and aromas become an integral and natural part of their lives.

For parents who themselves may not know enough about Hindu *samskaras* (rites of passage) or ritual ceremonies and festivals, the book provides useful information on bringing Hindu culture into everyday life.

Culture through dramatic arts
For Indian children, as with all young ones, it's important that the mainstream knows of and accepts their culture. In New York, noted *bharatanatyam* dancer Swati Bhise has been teaching and performing for more than 20 years and has taken Indian dance to scores of American public schools, teaching children from all cultures the music and dance of India.

In 2004 she founded Sanskriti Institute for Indian Culture with classes taking place at All Souls Church in Manhattan. The school integrates the ethos of Indian dance, music, literature and philosophy. While *bharatanatyam* is the basis, the curriculum includes the teaching of Carnatic music, yoga, Hindi classes and Sanskrit slokas, along with cultural history.

Many of the Indian parents who come are pleasantly surprised that it's not just about dance but also about asanas, the *navagrahas* and even Hindu iconography, be it in a temple or the Metropolitan Museum. Since the students are from many religions, Bhise and Bunty Sawhney, the director, teach about the Indian ethos but not directly about religion.

Indeed, the good news is that cultural organizations and schools are sprouting up everywhere, and a dance or music class is usually within reach. Rathi Raja, who is Director of the Young Indian Culture Group (YICC) in Long Island, NY, observes: "There are so many basement operations. For every one institution we see in the public eye, there are a hundred mini organizations of people doing something that they believe in."

Raja's Young Indian Culture Group, a not-for-profit organization, started with just 30 children 13 years ago and has grown to more than 200 children being taught Vedic traditions, classical and folk dance, music, languages, yoga and Vedic traditions by more than 25 teachers. The classes are held at the Herricks Middle School, thus becoming part and parcel of the mainstream and a community resource.

She feels that teaching native languages is as important as music and dance. "What is missing is an emphasis on language, and without that there is no depth to any of the other activities. You do *bharatanatyam*, and the patron God is Lord Siva. If the child doesn't have some ongoing education of the spiritual basis of it, then that education is incomplete."

The Vedic curriculum at the center, called Vedic Heritage, focuses on the symbolism in the Hindu tradition—units on *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Gita* and also a five-year program on the *Gita*, which starts with children in the middle school. "It's a very solid program that takes up certain chapters of the *Gita* and through that really opens the window to the broad philosophical underpinnings of Hinduism," says Raja. "I find high school students are very satisfied in terms of the study of who they are and what their roots are. With that interest, they may take up the study for the rest of their lives."

The center has a unique way of celebrating festivals through a combination of storytelling and bhajanas. It goes back to the ancient oral tradition with stories told in a musical fashion emphasizing values and making a connection between the storyteller and the listeners.

"It touches the spirit of all these stories," says Raja. "With all the automation and making *Ramayana* into shows and cartoons, children may know these stories but I don't think the bhakti is there. So, in a sense, we have to go back to our roots, to the ancient traditions of storytelling to make human connections with children and families, which helps bhakti to flower."

There are bhajanas for the younger children and chanting for the older ones. As Raja observes, "In our tradition there is such a vast ar-



MeeraMasi mom: Sheetal Singhal of San Jose, California, with her children. She and her sister Sonali Herrera teamed up to create high-quality Indian language books for children.

ray of prayers, you can never run out of them!" There is also a "Mommy and Me" program modeled on the mainstream programs, but here, mothers and their pre-school children sing Indian rhymes, the national anthem and do yoga, prayers and Indian crafts. Says Raja: "It's just a lot of fun—it's a cultural connection."

Raja points out that credit has to be given to the Indo-Guyanese community, which does a lot to keep Hindu culture flourishing through classes, programs and concerts. The Indian-American community, though, needs to pick up on the momentum and be more aware in building for the future, like the Jewish community. The Indian community, while building many temples, has generally not been into institution building.

"Every synagogue has a rite-of-passage program for all the milestones of a child's life. It's a whole cycle of life approach, and children grow up and then come back with their children," says Raja. "Their system works, and I think it's because they've institutionalized things and if a new person comes in, there are places where they could go."

Teaching language

Out in Fremont, California, Ruchira Agarwal, who was in the IT industry, decided

to venture into something totally new. The mother of two young kids, she has taken on the task of simplifying the learning of Indian languages for children born in this country. Indeed, language is one of the most important gifts that parents can pass on to their children and this is so often lost when parents are not vigilant enough or don't share a common language. So you have *Baby Hindustani* videos, which are modeled on the *Baby Einstein* videos—and not a single word of English is spoken on them!

These creative language-learning tools

teach basic words, colors and numbers, set to the music of Mozart, which is supposed to improve memory and language skills, as well as visual development, in toddlers. Now kids can learn Gujarati, Tamil, Telegu, as well as Hindi words and phrases, even as they sit on the sofa in front of the VCR.

Another useful tool comes from MeeraMasi ("Aunty Meera"), a company created by two sisters, Sheetal Singhal and Sonali Herrera of San Jose, California. Sonali can speak and understand Hindi,

but not read or write. She decided to create books that would fill that need for second-generation Indian-Americans who may be in the same boat. Sheetal, who is older and a *bharatanatyam* dance teacher, grew up in

India and can read and write Hindi. She came up with original nursery rhymes and translated some popular American ones for the children's book collection, the *Khush Manāo* Series. It offers five books of popular rhymes along with an audio CD to assist with Hindi pronunciation and tone. It is targeted at kids from birth to five years, the formative years for learning a language.

The cheerfully illustrated books are written in Hindi with English transliteration, which is helpful for those who don't know how to write the script. Their next book is *Var-namala Geet*, the equivalent of the ABC song—in Hindi. The sisters plan to do high-quality books in other Indian languages, too. Says Sonali, who is in marketing, "We think it's great that there are books out there in English, but we want to really stay true to our mission: producing materials in Indian languages."

Magazine for children

In Boston, Monika Jain, a journalist, and Leena Chawla, a software consultant—both mothers—teamed up to create a much-needed product for their children that was not out there in the market. Mainstream libraries had no magazine for South Asian children, and the material available did not reflect the realities of these children. One day five-year-old Sejal came home asking when they would be celebrating Passover—a Jewish holiday! *Kahani* was born, and this quarterly magazine (www.kahani.com) has quality writing and art by noted children's writers and artists who themselves are South Asian.

While these stories are intentionally not advocating religion, they celebrate India in all its diversity and also place Indian names and faces and lives in the American landscape. A charming story tells of a girl's first *kolu*, the setting up of a shelf of dolls during Navaratri festival. (See www1.mid-day.com/metro/ghatkopar/2003/september/64581.htm for a description of *kolu*.) Another is about a young boy learning learning yoga from his sari-clad grandmother as part of getting to know her and understanding his own ancestry.

The *kolu* story, for example, is as much a Hindu story as it is an Indian story, because it teaches children about their Indian culture. "So although we don't write specific stories about any religion in particular, we touch upon all those cultures through our stories," says Chawla. "It's a secular magazine, but we do teach them about Indian culture, science, geography and history so that they can be proud of their Indian heritage." Jain emphasizes that *Kahani* is about con-



temporary storytelling and art that the children can relate to. So in the *kolu* story, the dolls on the *kolupadi*, a set of shelves, include a Japanese superhero called Ultra Man, a great favorite of her son's. It brings culture into their realm in terms they can understand.

Kahani also fosters creativity in children growing up in America. In the magazine, a mother, Sujatha Ramnani, shares how the family uses colored blocks to create *ran-goli* patterns and says, "One difference is in India it's mainly a women's affair but here my son and husband are equally involved."

The magazine encourages children to be proactive by initiating a young writers' short story competition. Now the call has gone out for children to illustrate their stories, thus making children realize the importance of their lives and experiences.

Temple-based programs

There are no formal schools for Hindu culture. Now some Hindu temples in the US have started outreach programs. They have incorporated classical dance, sitar and tabla classes, along with yoga, Vedic traditions and language for their congregations. In the US there are more than 800 temples, small and large—the majority of South Indian tradition—be it the Hindu Temple Society of North America in New York, the Venkateshwara Temple in Pittsburgh or the Meenakshi Temple in Texas.

In fact, many Hindu temples have taken on the task of imparting Indian classical dance and music, regional language lessons and yoga to the children. For example, the Ganesha Pathashala at the Hindu Temple in Flushing, New York, runs religion classes, as well as language classes, teaching Hindi, Telegu, Tamil, Kannada and Sanskrit to children. But the temples are still scattered and

Language learning: MeeraMasi's *Khushē Manāo* series of nursery rhymes, both Eastern and Western, include an audio CD, Hindi script and English transliteration, all complemented with charming illustrations

far-flung, and what Rathi Raja of Young India Cultural Group would like to see is a community center model, a gathering place available to all members of the family to practice whatever interests them, from dance to music to meditation, a space where everyone from children to seniors can be in touch with their culture.

"Language, music, dance all have their place, but the concept of a community is very important," she says. "In areas where you have a lot of Indians it's good to have an organization that can serve the community. The children will grow up seeing Indian culture in their mainstream school and feel a connection to the people who run it and can share it with their peers. It's bringing role models in front of them."

Other Hindus could also take inspiration from South Indian families. Music and dance is part of the family tradition in South India—every daughter and son learns it right from childhood. Many go to India during the summer holidays where their children may take classes in Carnatic music and dance.

Conclusion

The Hindu children who grew up in America 20 years ago had few resources and were basically alone in a mainstream environment. Now many of them are having children of their own, and for them it's a challenge to pass on something they never had themselves. In many cases, language and rituals have been lost. So these books, CDs videos and classes are a useful resource for them.

Many of today's young adults are so completely mainstreamed that they are lost to the culture, especially if they did not see it

in their own family. "So much is dependent on individual families," says Raja, "A culture can't survive if it's so based on individual performance. Institutions, including temples, have to make these rituals available in a systematic fashion."

The large Indian population in the US now makes it possible for the community to have many more resources. Young families can find others like themselves who have similar backgrounds and needs. Collaborating with each other and forming community centers seems the ideal.

It is important to catch them young. As Pandya points out, "That is the only time-window you have as parents. The minds of children under the age of 10 (this age may vary but between the ages of seven and 10 they start asserting their own logic) are like a sponge, and they absorb everything you give them. Culture and religion are quite subtle—unlike, say, learning a new sport—and subtle things are absorbed, not given from the environment." She points out that younger children are more likely to spend more time with their parents and at home; as they get older, the outside influence will start weighing more into their lives.

Hindu parents can expose their children to the rich traditions of dance, music and language and make it an intrinsic part of their lives, rather than something that is a tacked-on option. If children absorb the culture as they learn to walk and talk and dream, it will not be something alien to them; it will belong to them, as do the family's precious silver Deities and *pūja* paraphernalia, to be cherished and passed on to the next generation.

Protecting Women in Marriage

India's anti-dowry laws may cause more problems than they solve

BY MADHU KISHWAR, NEW DELHI

WHEN A MAN COMMITS DOMESTIC violence, he is using brute force to condition the women of his family to accept a position of servitude. Only men with low self-esteem employ this approach, because they feel that they cannot adequately cope with a woman who thinks and acts as a free human being with a mind of her own.

A man's stated reason for wife abuse should not be taken as the actual cause of that violence. Most explanations are only an excuse to destroy a woman's sense of self-worth. The same logic applies to dowry-related violence. Although the terms "dowry death" and "dowry violence" have recently become popular, it is rare to find instances where a man batters a woman solely to extract additional dowry items or money from his in-laws. The beating is aimed at destroying her sense of self-worth. This is why a large dowry is no guarantee against domestic violence. I have learned of numerous situations where a woman suffers violence because her husband's family feels she might start considering herself high and mighty just because her natal family paid a large dowry.

Although I do not believe that dowry is the sole cause of domestic violence, there is no denying the fact that the sharp escalation in the amounts of money being spent on dowries has contributed to an increased perception of daughters as family burdens. Dowry-giving is now spreading even to communities that had no such tradition a generation or two ago, despite the fact that in the last two decades anti-dowry laws have become very stringent. Many interpret the failure of these laws to lessen dowry-giving as a sign of their poor implementation. It is my belief, however, that these laws have so many inherent flaws that their honest implementation is virtually impossible. This is one of several reasons why these laws have created more problems than they have solved.

A great many of these problems arise from ambiguous definitions of "dowry," combined with draconian provisions for breaking the dowry law. For example, "dowry" is prohibited, but voluntary "presents" to the bride and groom are allowed, provided that "such presents are of customary nature and the value thereof is not excessive and provided that such presents are recorded on a list maintained in accordance with the rules."

Who decides which gifts are voluntary and which ones are given under pressure of demand? Often, the very same family that declares, at the time of marriage, that they gave only "voluntary gifts" to the groom's family will not hesitate to attribute all their "gift-giving" to extortionist demands once the marriage turns sour and is headed for a breakdown. Moreover, how can it be decided when a gift is excessive, relative to the gift-giver's income, when, in India, very few people declare what they earn, and those who do often grossly under-report? How



COURTESY MADHU KISHWAR

does one judge the paying status of a family whose wealth is amassed from the "black market" or property holdings held in bogus names to avoid taxes? Finally, given the fact that dowry-giving is a crime, why would the groom's family dare put their signature on any list of gifts being given to them?

Although the law states that both dowry-giving and -taking are illegal, there is almost never an instance where a bride's family is prosecuted for giving dowry. The assumption is that "takers" are guilty and "givers" are hapless victims. Those campaigning against dowry make it appear as if escalating dowries are solely due to the greed of the groom's family. This is not true. If greed were the sole cause of dowry, India would

consist of two distinct sets of families: those who produced only sons and those who produced only daughters. The "son-blessed" families would be permanent winners and "daughter-cursed" families would be permanent losers. This is clearly not the case, since the family that gives on its daughter's wedding receives when its sons get married.

Among the most misleading and harmful aspects of the anti-dowry laws is the blurring of definition between the ancient tradition of *stridhan*, "woman's gift," with rapidly changing, modern-day marriage transactions described as dowry-giving. *Stridhan* is that portion of family wealth which belongs exclusively to women. It is usually passed from mother to daughter. It includes gifts of money, property, jewelry or a share in a family business. *Stridhan* also includes wealth generated by a woman through her own work or wealth coming to her through inheritance. It includes gifts given to a woman when she is married, not only from her mother but also from her in-laws. A defining characteristic of *stridhan* is that no one in the family has rights over it, except the woman to whom it is given.

Unlike *stridhan*, present-day dowries include gifts and wealth given at a daughter's wedding, not only to her, but to her husband and his relatives as well. This includes household goods as well as simple gifts ranging from clothing and jewelry for the daughter to exorbitant sums of cash and expensive pieces of property for the groom and his parents. The amount given as *stridhan* is supposed to be in proportion to the traditionally defined norms of what constitutes a woman's share in the family wealth.

However, the amount of dowry commanded by a groom has a direct relationship to his social status, income potential and social-familial connections. For this reason, that which is given to the groom and his family has assumed more the form of "groom price," paid with an intention of passing off the burden of an "unwanted" daughter to the groom's family. High dowry payments are more like an investment by the bride's family to gain an alliance with the groom's powerful connections

and moneymaking potential. That is why IAS or IPS officers command the highest dowries, while schoolteachers command far less. The marriage of a daughter to a well-placed man often means upward mobility for her entire natal family.

One component of dowry that still retains some resemblance to the traditional *stridhan* involves the bride's trousseau, gold jewelry, household goods and any property that her parents might put in her name. But even this does not always remain in her control, and often becomes the cause of future tussles.

Dowry amounts are rising exponentially, not so much because people have become greedier, but because standards of living are rising dramatically. Today, refrigerators, air conditioners, automobiles and a whole range of gadgetry have become an integral part of middle- and upper-middle-class dowries, because many families now perceive these items to be necessary in everyday life. Another important reason for the increased cash demands by the groom's family is that his parents see this as their only chance to be compensated for their investment in their son's upbringing and education. In the past, joint families were the norm and most parents could count on their sons to support them in old age. However, with the breakdown of joint families and the reluctance of many women to stay with their in-laws, the insecurity of the groom's parents triggers an impulse to extract what they can from the bride's family at the time of their son's marriage.

An important reason for the increase in domestic conflicts, rising dowry demands and the transformation of *stridhan* to groom price is that our legal enactments, administrative interventions and state policies are forcing the neutralization of families without due attention to the fact that the primary security for the vast majority of the elderly of India must come from their children, especially their sons. Parents invest all they can in their son's education and career with the hope and expectation that those sons will get jobs that bring about upward mobility for the whole family. Sons are expected to contribute to the education and marriage costs of younger siblings, as well as take care of parents in their old age. However, too many parents find this expectation unfulfilled when their sons get married, especially if those sons take up well-paying jobs or succeed in independent enterprises that are separate from the joint family economy. Not just in metropolitan cities, but even in small towns and villages of India, young wives are increasingly prone to insist on moving away from the joint family and setting up independent lives, even when their in-laws are not abusive.

The anti-dowry agitators do not take these new dynamics into account. They rely upon pious outrage and emotional outbursts when they demand that the law be made more and more stringent to abolish what they define as a "social evil." The only effect of the anti-dowry laws and campaign has been that the giving and taking of dowry has become more surreptitious. Earlier, families ensured that proper lists and accounts were prepared. The groom's family was made to sign lists of the things they received, and the dowry itself was put on display for all to see. There were numerous witnesses to the transaction. Today, no such lists are signed and most of the giving and receiving is shrouded in secrecy.

To further complicate the problem, many of today's women use the anti-dowry law to book husbands for maltreatment even if dowry is not the cause of marital breakdown. Thus, the anti-dowry law has not curbed the

giving and taking of dowry; it has only provided a powerful weapon for revenge. Lawyers and even police routinely advise families to list "dowry demands" as the primary cause of marital violence, even if in actual fact this is not at all the case.

Those who characterize dowry-related problems as a legacy of traditional Indian social norms ought to remember that there is little mention of exorbitant dowries causing the ruin of families in the literature of pre-British India. Dowry became an issue during the nineteenth century when colonial rulers carried out land-settlement operations in India. In conformity with Victorian norms that they were familiar with in their home country, land entitlements were given to "male heads of the family," bypassing India's then customary laws allowing various categories of secure entitlements to women. This concentrated the possession of property in the hands of men in an unprecedented way and paved the way for the disinheritance of women.

As the disinheritance of women became a widespread phenomenon, daughters began to be viewed as liabilities. Our modern inheritance laws have increasingly moved in favor of the interests of men and against those of women. The recent amendments in the Hindu Succession Act have tried to remove some of the glaring gender inequities, but there is no evidence that the government has an effective implementation plan to make that law a living force in property devolution.

However, the real battle lies in building a social consensus whereby parents begin to consider it a primary duty to provide the means of a secure and dignified life with or without marriage. Parents of brides should be urged to give their daughters income-generating forms of property, instead of spending huge amounts of money on expensive consumer items, which soon depreciate in value and therefore provide no long-term security to the woman. They should also endeavor to provide them with a house of their own (no matter how small and modest), so that their daughters have a safe dwelling from which no husband can throw them out.

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DINODIA

California Textbook Issue Has Its First Day in Court

Hindu American Foundation takes the State Board of Education to task over adoption procedure

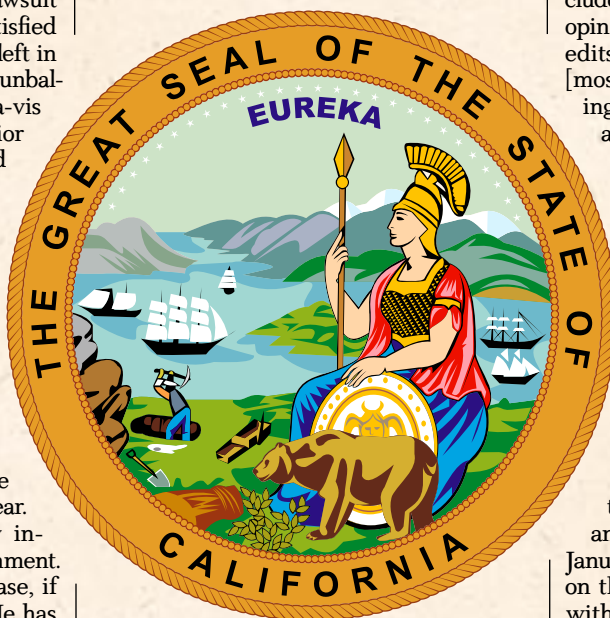
THE CALIFORNIA SUPERIOR COURT IN Sacramento ordered on April 21 that an expedited hearing schedule be determined in the lawsuit of the Hindu American Foundation, HAF, against the California State Board of Education, SBE, over the adoption of sixth grade social studies' books for next school year. The lawsuit was brought when Hindus were dissatisfied with the book review process, which left in place inaccuracies, distortions and an unbalanced presentation of Hinduism vis-a-vis other religions. In his ruling, Superior Court Judge Patrick Marlette stated twice that he was "troubled" by the SBE review process in adopting the books. HAF had charged that what is supposed to be a documented and transparent system of review actually progressed through 2005 and 2006 in a haphazard manner. Parts of the review, HAF contends, were contrary to California state law.

HAF's request for a preliminary injunction was rejected by Marlette in favor of a speedy schedule to resolve the complex case prior to the school year. It would be rare for a preliminary injunction to be issued against a government. Marlette could have dismissed the case, if he felt it had no merit, but did not. He has instead ordered the SBE and HAF to confer and propose a schedule for hearing the case expeditiously, before the textbooks in question are distributed this fall. He also recommended the two parties explore any possible resolution of the issues between them.

Important testimony in the case was given by Stan Metzenberg, a member of the SBE's Curriculum Commission. At their December 2 meeting, the Commission sided with the Hindus on most issues in the textbooks. Normally, their recommendation would be adopted by the SBE, but in this case were not. The SBE contended that its own Curriculum Commission failed to follow the guidelines laid out for it in reviewing the proposed Hindu "edits" (as the changes are called). As a result, the SBE held a separate, closed-door meeting on January 6 to again review the edits, and arrived at a different set of recom-

mendations, one less acceptable to Hindus.

Metzenberg, a professor at California's Northridge University, contends in his testimony that the Commission did indeed follow the Board's instructions. He is no stranger to textbook review, having been involved in improving the science curriculum in California



and testifying before the US Congress on the same issue. During the December 2 meeting, Metzenberg, a molecular biologist, took issue with the claims that there was an "Aryan Invasion" in ancient times in India—one of the main points of dispute with the texts. He took it upon himself to read the studies that had been done on the genetic makeup of individuals of the Indian subcontinent, and reviewed them with his wife, also a professor at Northridge and an expert in human genetics. At the meeting, he sided with the Hindus against the recommendation of several Western non-Hindu Indologists. In his testimony, he states, "My opinion as a scientist, and what I recommended to my fellow commissioners on December 2, was that Aryan Invasion Theory is not easily supported by genetic evidence, and, in fact, the preponderance of more recent genetic evidence would tend to

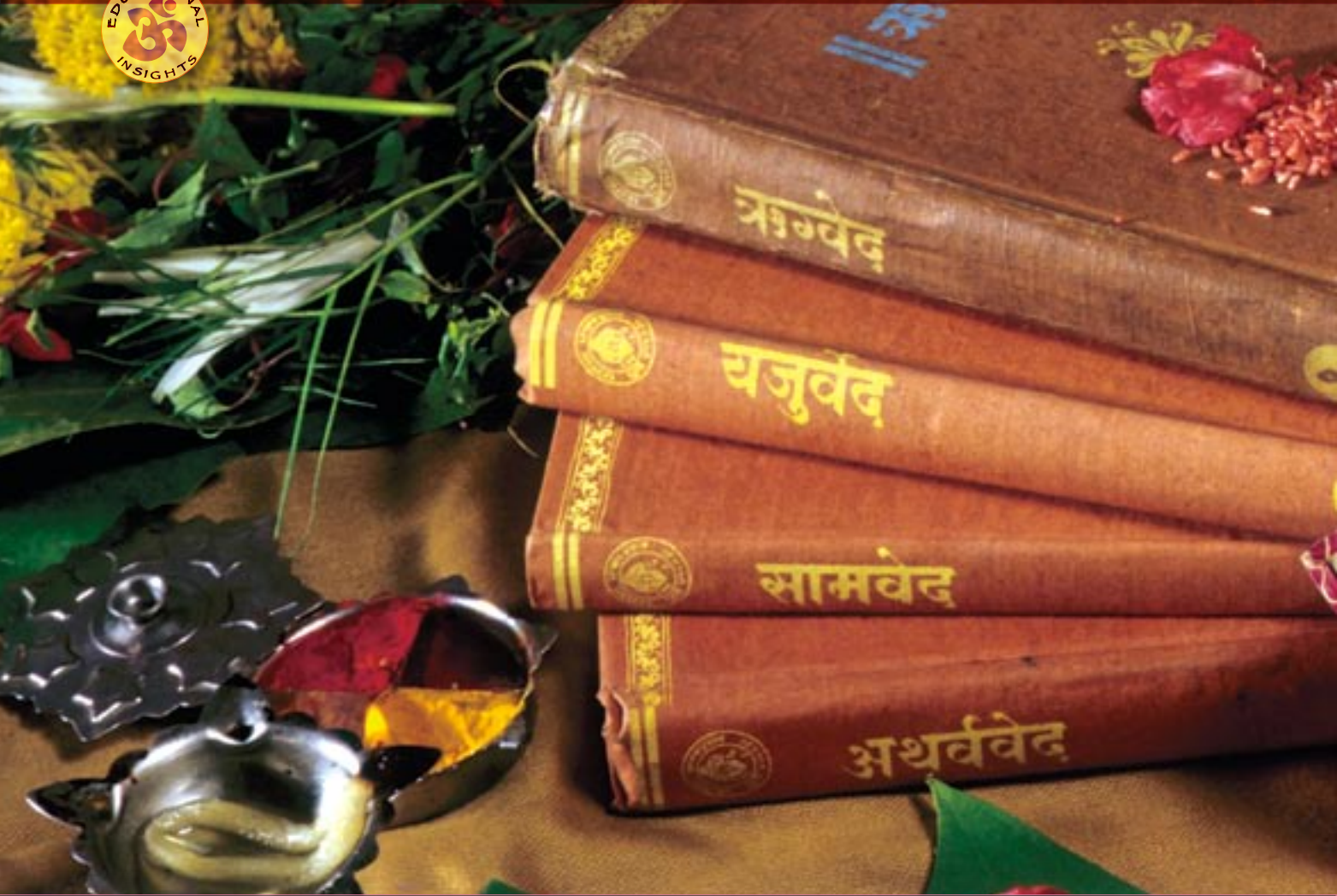
rule out a major invasion of Europeans. This is why I believe that it would be inaccurate to portray Aryan Invasion Theory as a fact in California textbooks. Our [the Commission's] addition of a qualified statement, 'Aryan invasion theory has been contradicted by some scholarly evidence,' is a sensible solution."

Another declaration submitted is that of Dr. Shiva Bajpai, who was hired by the Board as an expert in Indian history to review the proposed edits. Upon the entry of the non-Hindu Indologists in December, he was sidelined in the process. At the critical January 6 meeting, in which all contested edits were reviewed again, he was told that changes would only be made if he and Dr. Witzel of Harvard, leader of the non-Hindu Indologist group, agreed. This effectively gave veto power over the edits to Dr. Witzel, with the result that significant edits Hindus sought were not made. Bajpai concludes in his testimony, "It is my view and opinion that if the textbooks reflect only the edits recommended by the subcommittee [mostly the results of the January 6 meeting], those texts will portray Hinduism and Indian history inaccurately and in a manner that puts Hinduism in a rather unfavorable light. It is my view and opinion that the texts continue to require changes to make them comply with the standards imposed by law for textbooks in California."

On April 21, Judge Marlette requested the groups explore a settlement. The charges brought against the Board by HAF are fairly extensive, ranging from improper process to the specifics of five issues: women's rights, caste and untouchability, theology, comparison with other faiths and Aryan Invasion. Toward the end of January, prior to the final Board decision on the edits, HAF submitted a document with their recommendation on two dozen or so critical edits related to these five issues. This submission was rejected by the Board, which led to HAF's filing the lawsuit. The possibility remains that the Board and HAF could revisit this list of edits and try to work out a solution that does not hold up the entire textbook printing process, as a trial might. A solution based on these specific edits would not address the larger problems with the texts, but it would establish the rights of Hindus to at least an equal part in the process with Western, non-Hindu Indologists, some of whom appear to regard Hinduism with disdain. If, however, HAF prevails at trial, then court-ordered changes to the books to bring the treatment of Hinduism on par with the other religious would necessarily be quite extensive, as the court would not be limited to the relatively small corrections allowed in the Board's review process.

Hindu Scriptures

Ancient holy texts revealed by God and man



The Word, verily, is greater than name. The Word, in fact, makes known the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Atharva Veda* as the fourth, and the ancient lore as the fifth: the *Veda of Vedas*, the ritual for ancestors, calculus, the augural sciences, the knowledge of the signs of the times, ethics, political science, sacred knowledge, theology, knowledge of the spirits, military science, astrology, the science of snakes and of celestial beings.

Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad 7.2.1.
The Vedic Experience, Panikkar, p. 111

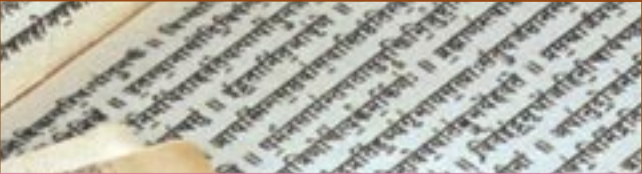
Than whom there is naught else higher,
than whom there is naught smaller,
naught greater, the One stands like
a tree established in heaven. By Him,
the Person, is this whole universe filled.

Krishna Yajur Veda, Shvetashvatara
Upanishad 3.9, The Principal
Upanishads, Radhakrishnan, p. 727



Presenting a mountaintop view
of the vast library of wisdom that
molds and influences Hindu life

Hinduism proudly embraces an incredibly rich collection of scripture. The holiest and most revered are the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, two massive compendia of *shruti* (that which is “heard”), both revealed by God to illumined sages centuries and millennia ago. The array of works known as *smriti* (that which is “remembered”) is equally vast, the most prominent and widely celebrated of which are the *Itihasas* (epic dramas and history)—the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*—and the *Puranas* (mythology). The Vedic arts and sciences, including ayurveda, astrology, music, dance, architecture, statecraft, domestic duty and law, are reflected in an assembly of texts known as *Ve-dangas* and *Upavedas*. Moreover, through the ages God-realized souls, sharing their experience, have poured forth volume upon volume that reveal the wonders of yoga and offer passionate hymns of devotion. The creation of Hindu scripture continues to this day, as contemporary masters reiterate the timeless truths to guide souls on the path to Divinity. In this Educational Insight, we offer a simple overview of Hindu scripture and an anthology of verses from this luminous library of dharma.



The stack of books at left holds one bound volume from each of the four *Vedas* in the Sanskrit language. For centuries they have been the basis of philosophical discussion, study and commentary. The *Vedas* are also the subject of deep study and meditation, to realize the wisdom of the ancients within oneself. Their mantras are chanted and used in rites of worship, prayer and japa.

The man who rejects the words of the scriptures and follows the impulse of desire attains neither his perfection, nor joy, nor the Path Supreme. Let the scriptures be, therefore, thy authority as to what is right and what is not right.

Bhagavad Gita 16.23-24, Mascaro, p. 111

What Are
Hindu Revealed
Scriptures?

The *Vedas* and *Agamas*, revealed by God, are Hinduism’s sovereign scriptures, called *shruti*, “that which is heard.” Their timeless truths are expressed in the most extraordinarily profound mystical poetry known to man. Aum.



Above, God holds the holiest of scriptures, the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. Around these are an array of other scriptures, enscribed on stone, wood, pillars and scrolls. At left, we see a copy of the *Rig Veda Samhita*. In the dimmed background, lamps are offered, as prescribed in the *Agamas*, by priests at Nallur Kandaswamy Temple in Sri Lanka.

VEDA, FROM VID, “TO KNOW,” MEANS “SUPREME wisdom or science.” Similarly, *Agama*, which names the sacred sectarian revelations, means “descent of knowledge.” The *Vedas* and *Agamas* are eternal truths transmitted by God through great clairaudient and clairvoyant rishis. They are Hinduism’s primary and most authoritative scriptures, expounding life’s sacredness and man’s purpose on the planet. These psalms of wisdom were disclosed over many centuries, memorized and orally conveyed from generation to generation within priestly families, then finally

written down in Sanskrit in the last few millennia. The subtly symbolic language of *shruti*, the cherished word of God, is lyrical and lofty. In imparting religious practice, rules and doctrine, the *Vedas* are general and the *Agamas* specific. The *Vedas* extol and invoke a multiplicity of Gods through elaborate fire rituals called *yajna*. The *Agamas* center around a single Deity and His worship with water, flowers and lights in sanctified temples and shrines. The *Tirumantiram* lauds, “Two are the scriptures that Lord Siva revealed—the primal *Vedas* and the perfect *Agamas*.” Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Nature of the Veda Texts?

The holy *Vedas*, man's oldest scripture, dating back 6,000 to 8,000 years, are a collection of four books: the *Rig*, *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*. Each has four sections: hymns, rites, interpretation and philosophical instruction. Aum.



THOMAS KELLY

BACKGROUND PHOTO, HINDUISM TODAY

ART BY S. RAJAM



Above, using the traditional *elutani*, stylus, a pandit scribes memorized Vedic verses on dried palm leaves. For centuries the *Vedas* were passed on orally, then finally transcribed. Left, a devotee leafs through his holy text as he performs his morning *sadhana*.

How Are the Vedas Significant Today?

The *Vedas*, the ultimate scriptural authority, permeate Hinduism's thought, ritual and meditation. They open a rare window into ancient Bharata society, proclaiming life's sacredness and the way to oneness with God. Aum.



REUTERS/JITENDRA PRAKASH

BACKGROUND: AFP PHOTO/DESHAKALYAN CHOWDHURY

REUTERS/RAJ PATIDAR



Above, a young Smarta priest conducts a fire ceremony, *havana*, as decreed in the *Vedas*. At left, a Vaishnava priest blows a conch horn during prayers in Allahabad. Background photo, at Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi, a priest performs *antyeshti*, the cremation ritual, last in the series of rites of passage prescribed in the *Vedas*.

THE OLDEST AND CORE PORTIONS OF THE *Vedas* ARE the four *Samhitas*, “hymn collections.” They consist of invocations to the One Divine and the Divinities of nature—such as the Sun, the Rain, the Wind, the Fire and the Dawn—as well as prayers for matrimony, progeny, prosperity, concord, domestic rites, formulas for magic, and more. They are composed in beautiful metrical verses, generally of three or four lines. The heart of the entire Veda is the 10,552-verse *Rig Samhita*. The *Sama* and *Yajur Samhitas*, each with about 2,000 verses, are mainly liturgical selections from

the *Rig*, whereas most of the *Atharva Samhita*'s nearly 6,000 verses of prayers, charms and rites are unique. The *Sama* is arranged for melodious chanting, the *Yajur* for cadenced intonation. Besides its *Samhita*, each *Veda* includes one or two *Brahmanas*, ceremonial handbooks, and *Aranyakas*, ritual interpretations, plus many inestimable *Upanishads*, metaphysical dialogs. In all there are over 100,000 Vedic verses, and some prose, in dozens of texts. The *Tirumantiram* confirms, “There is no dharma other than what the *Vedas* say. Dharma's central core the *Vedas* proclaim.” Aum Namah Sivaya.

LIKE THE TAOIST TAO TE CHING, THE BUDDHIST *Dhammapada*, the Sikh *Adi Granth*, the Jewish *Torah*, the Christian *Bible* and the Muslim *Koran*, the *Veda* is the Hindu holy book. For untold centuries unto today, it has remained the sustaining force and authoritative doctrine, guiding followers in ways of worship, duty and enlightenment—*upasana*, dharma and *jnana*. The *Vedas* are the meditative and philosophical focus for millions of monks and a billion seekers. Their stanzas are chanted from memory by priests and laymen daily as liturgy in temple worship and domestic ritual.

All Hindus wholeheartedly accept the *Vedas*, yet each draws selectively, interprets freely and amplifies abundantly. Over time, this tolerant allegiance has woven the varied tapestry of Bharata Dharma. Today the *Vedas* are published in Sanskrit, English, French, German and other languages. But it is the metaphysical and popular *Upanishads* which have been most amply and ably translated. The *Vedas* say, “Just as the spokes are affixed to the hub of a wheel, so are all things established in life, the *Rig* and *Yajur* and *Sama Veda*, sacrifice, the nobility and also the priesthood.” Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Nature of the Holy Agamas?

The *Agamas*, Sanatana Dharma's second authority, are revelations on sacred living, worship, yoga and philosophy. Saivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism each exalts its own array of *Agamas*, many more than 2,000 years old. Aum.



FR. INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERRY



BACKGROUND, THOMAS KELLY
FR. INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERRY

Above, Dr. Ganesan, a scholar at the French Institute of Pondicherry, India, shows the volumes of *Saiva Agamas* they have printed to date. They are keepers of 8,000 ancient manuscripts, mostly palm-leaf books, such as those seen stored on shelves on the left, which one day will be published to the world. In the background, a devotee offers flowers to the Lord.

IN THE VAST AGAMIC LITERATURE, TRADITION counts 92 main *Saiva Agamas*—10 Siva, 18 Rudra and 64 Bhairava—77 Sakta *Agamas* and 108 *Vaishnava Pancharatra Agamas*. Most *Agamas* are of four parts, called *padas*, and possess thousands of metered Sanskrit verses, usually of two lines. The *charya pada* details daily religious observance, right conduct, the guru-*shishya* relationship, community life, house design and town planning. The *kriya pada*, commonly the longest, extols worship and temples in meticulous detail—from site selection, architectural design and ico-

nography, to rules for priests and the intricacies of daily puja, annual festivals and home-shrine devotionals. The yoga *pada* discloses the interior way of meditation, of raja yoga, mantra and tantra, which stimulates the awakening of the slumbering serpent, kundalini. The jnana *pada* narrates the nature of God, soul and world, and the means for liberation. The *Tirumantiram* declares, “*Veda* and *Agama* are Iraivan’s scriptures. Both are truth: one is general, the other specific. While some say these words of God reach two different conclusions, the wise see no difference.” Aum Namah Sivaya.

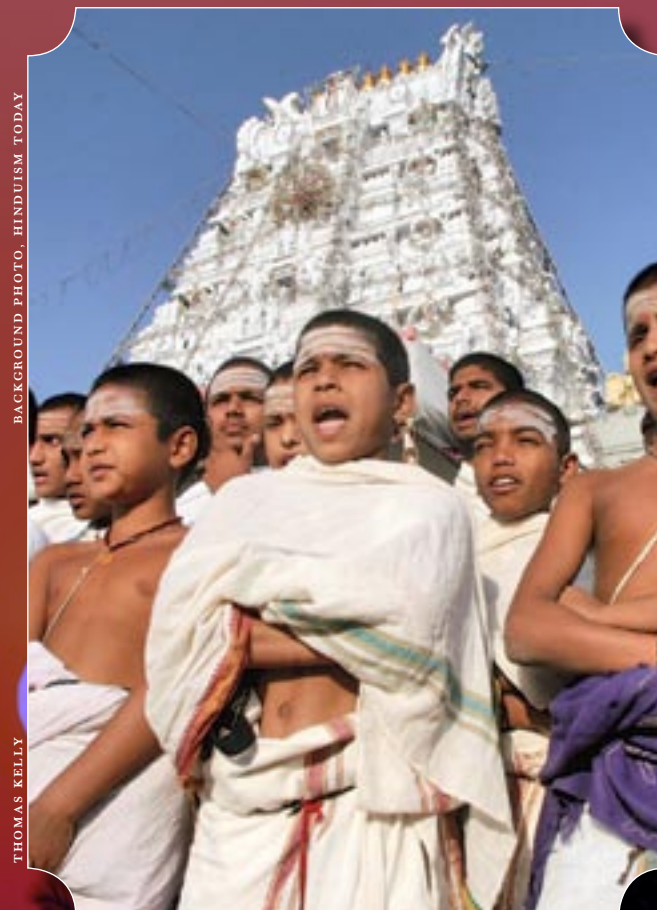
How Are the Agamas Significant Today?

While the *Vedas*, with myriad Deities, bind all Hindus together, the *Agamas*, with a single supreme God, unify each sect in a oneness of thought, instilling in adherents the joyful arts of divine adoration. Aum Namah Sivaya.



THOMAS KELLY

Like millions of Hindus before them, the youth in these two photos are learning precise recitation of liturgy from the *Agamas* and *Vedas*. They will spend years perfecting this training, enabling them to perform ritual worship, puja, in temples around the world. In their priest school in Tirupati, India, they will memorize hundreds of mantras.



BACKGROUND PHOTO, HINDUISM TODAY
THOMAS KELLY

GOD IS LOVE, AND TO LOVE GOD IS THE pure path prescribed in the *Agamas*. Veritably, these texts are God’s own voice admonishing the *samsari*, reincarnation’s wanderer, to give up love of the transient and adore instead the Immortal. How to love the Divine, when and where, with what mantras and visualizations and at what auspicious times, all this is preserved in the *Agamas*. The specific doctrines and practices of day-to-day Hinduism are nowhere more fully expounded than in these revelation hymns, delineating everything from daily work routines to as-

trology and cosmology. So overwhelming is Agamic influence in the lives of most Hindus, particularly in temple liturgy and culture, that it is impossible to ponder modern Sanatana Dharma without these discourses. While many *Agamas* have been published, most remain inaccessible, protected by families and guilds who are stewards of an intimate hereditary knowledge. The *Tirumantiram* says, “Nine are the *Agamas* of yore, in time expanded into 28, they then took divisions three, into one truth of Vedanta-Siddhanta to accord. That is Sudha Saiva, rare and precious.” Aum Namah Sivaya.

Do Smṛiti and Sacred Literature Differ?

Hindu sacred literature is a treasury of hymns, legend, mythology, philosophy, science and ethics. From among this vast body of writings, each lineage recognizes a select portion as its secondary scripture, called *smṛiti*. Aum.



DINODIA

BACKGROUND PHOTO BY THOMAS KELLY

MANAS DAS

Above, Masako Ono voyaged from Japan to India to learn the ancient Odissi dance style and remained there to teach it. The many human arts are found in ancient scripture. At left, a collection of Hindu holy texts stacked in a Delhi store. In the background, two girls reverently touch the holy feet of Lord Vishnu at a shrine in Tirupati.

What Texts Amplify Vedas and Agamas?

Many texts support the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. *Vedangas* detail conduct, astrology, language and etymology. *Upavedas* unfold politics, health, warfare and music. *Upagamas* and *Paddhatis* elaborate the Agamic wisdom. Aum.



DINODIA

SESHU BADRINATH/PIPAL PRODUCTIONS

DINODIA

Above, a bride and groom are in the midst of their wedding; at left they hold an offering of sacred grasses; wedding chants derive from the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and ancillary texts; attitudes and guidelines for family life are found in the *Sutras* and *Shastras*. In the background photo, a girl receives sacraments after a puja.

WHILE THE *VEDAS* AND *AGAMAS* ARE SHARED as part of every Hindu's primary scripture, *shruti*, each sect and lineage defines its own unique set of *smṛiti*. The sacred literature, *punya shastra*, from which *smṛiti* is drawn consists of writings, both ancient and modern, in many languages. Especially central are the ancient Sanskritic texts, such as the *Itihasas*, *Puranas* and *Dharma Sastras*, which are widely termed the classical *smṛiti*. In reality, while many revere these as *smṛiti*, others regard them only as sacred literature. *Smṛiti* means "that which is remembered" and is known as "the

tradition," for it derives from human insight and experience and preserves the course of culture. While *shruti* comes from God and is eternal and universal, the ever-growing *smṛiti* canon is written by man. Hinduism's sacred literature is the touchstone of theater and dance, music, song and pagentry, yoga and *sadhana*, metaphysics and ethics, exquisite art and hallowed sciences. The *Vedas* inquire, "In whom are set firm the firstborn seers, the hymns, the songs and the sacrificial formulas, in whom is established the single seer—tell me of that support—who may He be?" Aum Namah Sivaya.

MUCH OF HINDUISM'S PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE is safeguarded in venerable texts which amplify *shruti*. The *Vedangas* and *Upavedas* are collections of texts that augment and apply the *Vedas* as a comprehensive system of sacred living. *Jyotisha Vedanga* delineates auspicious timing for holy rites. *Kalpa Vedanga* defines public rituals in the *Srauta* and *Sulba Sutras*, domestic rites in the *Grihya Sutras* and religious law in the *Dharma Sastras*. Four other *Vedangas* ensure the purity of mantra recitation, through knowledge of phonetics, grammar, poetry and the way of words.

The *Upavedas* expound profound sciences: *Arthaveda* unfolds statecraft; *Ayurveda* sets forth medicine and health; *Dhanurveda* discusses military science; *Gandharvaveda* illumines music and the arts; and *Sthapatyaveda* explains architecture. In addition, the *Kama Sutras* detail erotic pleasures. The *Agamas*, too, have ancillary texts, such as the *Upagamas* and *Paddhatis*, which elaborate the ancient wisdom. The *Jnaneshvari* says, "The *Vedas* in their perfection are as the beautiful image of the God of which the flawless words are the resplendent body. The *smṛitis* are the limbs thereof." Aum Namah Sivaya.

Does Hinduism Have Epics and Myths?

The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are Hinduism's most renowned epic histories, called Itihasa. The *Puranas* are popular folk narratives, teaching faith, belief and ethics in mythology, allegory, legend and symbolism. Aum.



Above, a woman performs a dance depicting a scene from the *Ramayana* in Java, where the world-renowned epic is widely depicted in gala dance and theater. At left, Sanskrit volumes of the famed poem are shown, along with Hinduism's other epic, the *Mahabharata*.

Are There Other Types of Sacred Texts?

India's lofty philosophical texts expound diverse views in exacting dialectics. Yoga treatises unveil the mysterious path to ultimate samadhis. Intimate devotional hymns disclose the raptures of consummate Divine love. Aum.



Above, a recluse, clearly immersed in his yoga *sadhana*, sits in meditation beneath a gnarled banyan tree. At left are displayed two primary yoga scriptures, *Yoga Sutras* and *Yoga Vashishtha*. In the background, a young lady lights a ghee lamp to offer in personal worship, as her ancestors have done for centuries.

HINDUISM'S POETIC STORIES OF RISHIS, Gods, heroes and demons are sung by gifted panditas and traveling bards, narrated to children and portrayed in dramas and festivals. The *Mahabharata*, the world's longest epic poem, is the legend of two ancient dynasties whose great battle of Kurukshetra is the scene of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the eloquent spiritual dialog between Arjuna and Krishna. The *Ramayana* relates the life of Rama, a heroic king revered as the ideal man. The *Puranas*, like the *Mahabharata*, are encyclopedic in scope, containing teachings on sadhana,

philosophy, dharma, ritual, language and the arts, architecture, agriculture, magic charms and more. Of 18 principal *Puranas*, six honor God as Siva, six as Vishnu and six as Brahma. The witty *Panchatantra*, eminent among the "story" literature, or *katha*, portrays wisdom through animal fables and parables. The *Bhagavad Gita* proclaims, "He who reads this sacred dialog of ours, by him I consider Myself worshiped through the sacrifice of knowledge. And the man who listens to it with faith and without scoffing, liberated, he shall attain to the happy realm of the righteous." Aum Namah Sivaya.

IN ADDITION TO THE EPICS, LEGENDS AND SUPPLEMENTS to the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, there is a wealth of Hindu metaphysical, yogic and devotional writings. Considered foundational are the early texts defining the six philosophical *darshanas*: the *sutras* by Kapila, Patanjali, Jaimini, Badarayana, Kanada and Gautama. Hailed as leading occult works on yoga, asanas, *nadis*, chakras, kundalini and *samadhi* are the *Yoga Sutras*, *Tirumantiram*, *Yoga Vashishtha*, *Siva Sutras*, *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati*, *Jnaneshvari*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*. Widely extolled among the

bhakti literature are the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Narada Sutras*, *Tiruvassagam*, the *Vachanas* of the Sivasharanas and the hymns of mystic poets like Surdas, Tukaram, Ramprasad, Mirabai, Andal, Vallabha, Tulasidasa, Tayumanavar, Lalla, Tagore, Auvaiyar and the saintly Nayanars and Alvars. *The Bhagavad Gita* explains, "As a blazing fire reduces the wood to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all activity to ashes. There is nothing on Earth which possesses such power to cleanse as wisdom. The perfect yogin finds this knowledge in himself by himself in due time." Aum Namah Sivaya.



THOMAS KELLY

How Did the Sage of Kanchi Extol the Vedas?

Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati wrote, “The *Vedas* are eternal and are the source of all creation. Their greatness is to be known in many ways. Their sound produces in our *nadis* (subtle nerve channels), as well as in the atmosphere, vibrations that are salutary not only to our own Self but to the entire world—to the good of mankind as well as of all other creatures.”



ART BY S. RAJAM

Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati [1894–1994], 68th pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, depicted above, walked throughout India teaching of the *Vedas*. Here he is shown before an image of Siva as Dakshinamurti, the silent guru seated beneath a banyan tree. Above left, an earthen mandala on a wall of Muktinath Temple in Nepal.

As when a fire is lit with damp fuel, different clouds of smoke come forth. In the same way from this great Being are breathed forth the *Rig, Yajur, Sama* and *Atharva Vedas*.

Shukla Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.10



AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, MAHADEVO SEN



DINODIA

Above, an Indian boy piously pours ghee on the sacred fire, keeping the flame of devotion alive. At left, devotees worship the Sun in Bihar during Chhat festival, when, for one night and day, the people live on the banks of the river Ganga making offerings to Surya, the gracious Sun God, a primary Deity honored in the *Vedas*.

“THE CONCERN FOR ALL CREATION THAT FINDS expression in the *Vedas* is not shared by any other religion. *Shanno astu dvipade shancha-tushpade*—this occurs in a mantra. The *Vedas* pray for the good of all creatures including bipeds, quadrupeds, etc. Even grass, shrubs, trees, mountains and the rivers are not excluded from their benign purview. The happy state of all these sentient creatures and inert objects is brought about through the special quality of the *Vedas*.

“The *Vedas* are also notable for the lofty truths expressed in the mantras. The tenets of these scrip-

tures have aroused the wonder of people of other lands, of other faiths. They are moved by the poetic beauty of the hymns, the subtle manner in which principles of social life are dealt with, the metaphysical truths embedded and expounded in them, and their moral instruction as well as scientific truths.

“There are mantras that are specially valuable for their sound but are otherwise meaningless. Similarly, there are works pregnant with meaning but with no mantric power. The remarkable thing about the *Vedas* is that they are of immeasurable value as much for their sound as for their verbal content. While

they have the mantric power to do immense good to each one of us and to the world, they also contain teachings embodying great metaphysical truths.

“It must here be emphasized that on the doctrinal level the *Vedas* deal both with worldly life and the inner life of the Self. They teach how to conduct ourselves in such a manner as to create atmic well-being. And their concern is not with the liberation of the individual alone; they speak about the ideals of social life and about the duties of the public. How the brahmin ought to lead his life and how the king must rule his subjects and what ideals women are

to follow: an answer to these—stated in the form of laws—is to be found in these scriptures.

“My duty is to impress upon you that it is your responsibility to keep the Vedic tradition alive. If in India the *Vedas* retain their original vitality even today, it is because they are being continuously repeated by students and teachers of the *Vedas*, and the purity of the sounds and accents of the words are retained in that process. But it is only by practicing the Vedic injunctions that we can obtain the grace of God, both for our individual welfare and for the welfare of the whole world.”

Life illumined with scriptural wisdom

Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, was once asked, “What can I say if a missionary comes to my door and asks, ‘Does Hinduism have a Bible?’” He answered, “You can say, ‘Yes, we have the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, plus a hundred other scriptures that serve us very well, thank you.’” Indeed, this diverse body of knowledge is unlike the one Holy Book of other world faiths. It is diverse, a bit neglected, some nearly lost, some actually lost, but all of it precious. In truth, it yet defines and colors Hindu life like the

genetic code that makes a starfish a starfish. It is reflected in the beautiful Hindu style of music, art, drama, dance, work ethics, law, domestic values, spiritual striving, relationships, rites of passage, astrology, medicine, games, love and business, architecture and storytelling, government and diplomacy, and the working together of this physical world with the heavenly realms of existence. This grand legacy helps make Hindus the gracious people they are, with qualities of humility, appreciation, love of God, forbearance, joy and soulful depth of character.



marriage & family



blessings



diet, ayurveda

The soul is born and unfolds in a body, with dreams and desires and the food of life. And then it is reborn in new bodies in accordance with its former works. The quality of the soul determines its future body—earthly or airy, heavy or light.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 5.11–12.
The Upanishads, Mascaro, p. 94

With earnest effort hold the senses in check. Controlling the breath, regulate the vital activities. As a charioteer holds back his restive horses, so does a persevering aspirant restrain his mind.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 2.9. The Upanishads,
Prabhavananda & Manchester, p. 192

The guru who has attained Self Realization can alone help the aspirant in acquiring it.

Siva Sutras 2.6, Jaideva Singh, p. 102

If daily to his home the friends who love him come, and coming, bring delight to eyes that kindle bright, a man has found the whole of life within his soul.

Panchatantra, Ryder, p. 218

In the beginning of worship, at the conclusion of the rite, in the offering of water, in the anointing of the image, in the bathing of the image, in the offering of light, in the sprinkling of the image with sandal, in the bathing of the image with consecrated liquids, in the offering of incense, in the act of worship, and in all other things to be done, the Sivacharya should strike the great bell.

Karana Agama 190-191, Motivations of Temple
Architecture in Saiva Siddhanta, p.160



festivals



music



venerating gurus



blessing a new home



love of nature

Mantra yields early success due to practice done in previous life. Self-fulfilling, too, is the mantra which is received according to the line of tradition, with due diksha, obtained in the right way. Innumerable are the mantras; they but distract the mind. Only that mantra which is received through the grace of the guru gives all fulfillment.

Kularnava Tantra 11.3, Woodroff & Pandit, p. 112

O thou who pervades all space, both now and hereafter, as the Soul of souls! The *Vedas*, *Agamas*, *Puranas*, *Itihasas* and all other sciences inculcate fully the tenet of nonduality. It is the inexplicable duality that leads to the knowledge of nonduality. This is consonant with reason, experience, tradition, and is admitted by the dualists and nondualists.

Tayumanavar, 10.3, The Poems of Tayumanavar, Coomaraswamy, p. 44

By overthrowing the aggregate of the six enemies [lust, anger, greed, vanity, haughtiness and overjoy], he shall restrain the organs of sense; acquire wisdom by keeping company with the aged; see through his spies; establish safety and security by being ever active; maintain his subjects in the observance of their respective duties by exercising authority; keep

up his personal discipline by receiving lessons in the sciences; and endear himself to the people by bringing them in contact with wealth and doing good to them.

Book I, Chapter 7, The Life of a Holy King, Kautilya's
Arthashastra, R. Shamasastri

Once Rama asked Hanuman, “How do you look at Me?” And Hanuman replied: “O Rama, as long as I have the feeling of ‘I, I see that Thou art the whole and I am a part; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant. But when, O Rama, I have the knowledge of Truth, Then I realize that Thou art I, and I am Thou.”

From the Ramayana, as quoted by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

Let us have concord with our own people, and concord with people who are strangers to us. Asvins, create between us and the strangers a unity of hearts.

Atharva Veda Samhita, 7.52.1

In him who is pure of mind, intellect and ego, the senses and their perceptions are pure, in fact, and he finds everything pure as well.

Sarvajnanottara Agama, Atma Sakshatkara 62,
Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, p.110



pilgrimage



devotional art



nurturing children

One who is established in the contemplation of nondual unity will abide in the Self of everyone and realize the immanent, all-pervading One. There is no doubt of this.

Sarvajnanottara Agama, Atma Sakshatkara 14, Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, p.107

The Self resides within the lotus of the heart. Knowing this, consecrated to the Self, the sage enters daily that holy sanctuary. Absorbed in the Self, the sage is freed from identity with the body and lives in blissful consciousness.

Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad 8.3.3-4, The Upanishads, Prabhavananda & Manchester, p. 122

With the help of the gardeners called Mind and Love, plucking the flower called Steady Contemplation, offering the water of the flood of the Self's own bliss, worship the Lord with the sacred formula of silence!

Lalla, The Sources of Indian Tradition, p. 360

The Lord of Appati is both inside and outside, form and no form. He is both the flood and the bank. He is the broad-rayed sun. Himself the highest mystery, He is in all hidden thoughts. He is thought and meaning, and embraces all who embrace Him.

Tirumurai 4.48.7. Poems to Siva, The Hymns of the Tamil Saints, Peterson, p. 114

At the time of the sacrifice, O Lord of the wood [Agni], the worshipers smear you with sacred oil. When you stand upright or when you repose on Earth's bosom, you still will grant us good fortune. Set up to the East of the sacred fire, you accept our prayer, intense and unflagging. Hold yourself high to bring us prosperity. Drive far away dearth of inspiration. Lord of the wood, take now your stance on this, the loftiest spot of all Earth. Well-fixed and measured one, give to the worshiper, who brings a sacrifice, honor and glory.

Rig Veda 3.8.1-3, The Vedic Experience, Pannikar, p. 373-374

There is no difference between devotion and perfect knowledge. A person who is engrossed in devotion enjoys perpetual happiness. And perfect knowledge never descends in a vicious person averse to devotion.

Siva Purana, Rudra Samhita. 23.16, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology, vol 1, p. 380

As wide Earth, as fire and water, as sacrificer and wind that blows, as eternal moon and sun, as ether, as the eight-formed God, as cosmic good and evil, woman and man, all other forms and His own form, and all these as Himself, as yesterday and today and tomorrow, the God of the long, red hair stands, O Wonder!

Tirumurai 6.308.1. Poems to Siva, The Hymns of the Tamil Saints, Peterson, p.113



HINDUISM TODAY

meditation



REUTERS. BAZUKI MUHAMMAD

penance



PAUL ESTCOURT/HERALD PICTURE

dance



REUTERS. DIPAK KUMAR

in the military



BAPS

guiding children



HINDUISM TODAY

monastic life

Cooking for Your Health

Part textbook, part cookbook, this colorful guide tutors us in the Ayurvedic ways of using food as medicine

BY JANE SRIVASTAVA, USA

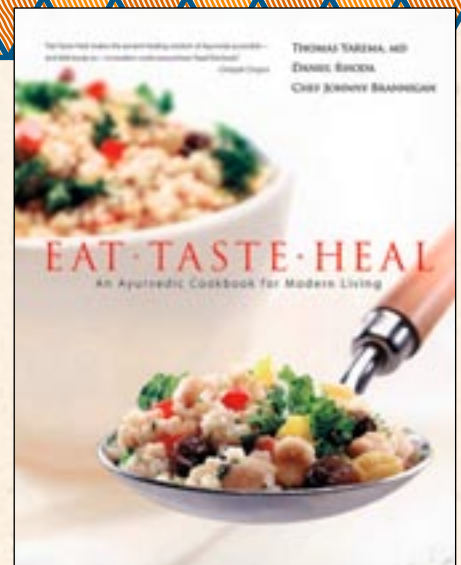
ALTHOUGH EAT, TASTE, HEAL: AN Ayurvedic Cookbook for Modern Living, by Thomas Yarema, M.D., Daniel Rhoda and chef Johnny Brannigan (352 pages, Five Elements Press, US \$29.95), has the word *cookbook* in its title, it is equally a comprehensive guide to ayurvedic medicine and nutrition. Written by a unique trio of a medical doctor who operates a holistic clinic in Hawaii, a patient led to the study of ayurveda by a debilitating health condition and an ayurvedic chef, respectively, it contains two books in one: "The Guidebook" and "The Cookbook." Drawing on knowledge of the ancient medicine of ayurveda, the authors persuasively assert that we are our own best healers, capable of leading lives of vibrant health by appropriately nourishing our bodies and souls.

The book's interactive nature will undoubtedly create a feeling in each reader that it speaks to him or her personally. Just from the first chapters of the guidebook, the reader can take a questionnaire that helps determine his or her constitutional type (*dosha*), ascertain whether

it is in the state of imbalance, and immediately start on the road of self-healing.

Rather than classifying the foods according to their physical qualities, such as fats, carbohydrates and proteins, ayurveda categorizes foods according their effect on each *dosha* and presence of the six tastes (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent). There are no dogmatic diets in ayurvedic nutrition. Eating fresh, organic foods rich in energy (or prana) and in accordance with our individual needs is a key to health. The old premise, "You are what you eat," is still true, but ayurveda expands the premise to read: "You are what, how, when and why you eat." It emphasizes other factors important to healthy eating, such as proper state of mind, ambiance and eating only when hungry, as well as changing seasonal nutritional needs.

The authors proclaim that, to stimulate our senses and promote digestion, food should taste delicious. In the cookbook, chef Johnny uses his cross-cultural cooking experience and training in ayurveda to create versatile, savory and therapeutic dishes. The stunning photographs will make your mouth water as you read through the reci-



pes. The first part of the cookbook is a collection of menu options for each *dosha* that is fairly easy to tackle, even for a beginner cook. The expanded recipe section offers more complicated recipes that include main dishes, grains, side dishes, soups, salads, starters, snacks, dressings, sauces, condiments, breads, beverages and desserts. An entire section of the cookbook is devoted to the preparation of ayurvedic basics, such as ghee, yogurt, seasonings and stocks. Throughout the cookbook, each recipe is presented according to the specific *dosha* it is designed to balance. Modifications of the same recipes are suggested for the other *doshas*. One whole chapter is devoted to "Food as Medicine." It recommends foods for certain illnesses, pregnancy and breast-feeding, cleansing and fasting.

Both vegetarians and wanna-be vegetarians will find the book useful, since it offers vegetarian, as well as a few fish and chicken recipes to tide the meat eater through the transition. The authors recommend that a successful transition will include adopting a diet fitting your unique constitution and making gradual dietary changes.

The book is thoroughly researched and answers many important questions consumers have about organic food, genetically modified foods, safety of food additives and water. It gives advice on stocking your ayurvedic pantry, food storage and kitchen utensils and appliances. The presence of the color-coded pages, charts and tables make the book easy to follow and to refer back to. This thought-provoking, multifaceted book makes us reflect not only about our own nature and food choices, but on how these choices affect the world around us. *Eat, Taste, Heal* can proudly grace anyone's cookbook and holistic/self-healing collection. 🍽️

EAT, TASTE, HEAL: AN AYURVEDIC COOKBOOK FOR MODERN LIVING, BY THOMAS YAREMA, DANIEL RHODA AND CHEF JOHNNY BRANNIGAN, FIVE ELEMENTS PRESS, 4504 KUKUI ST., SUITE 13, KAPAA, HAWAII 96746. TELEPHONE: 808 822-4177
E-MAIL: DANIELRHODA@EATTASTEHEAL.COM



Trumpet dosa: This large fried crepe is made with a wheat-free batter of rice and lentils then filled with subji, a spiced mixture of potatoes, green peas, leeks and coconut milk

PHOTO BY ED OULLETTE, FOOD STYLING BY DENISE VIVALDO



Management

God as chairman of the board: Lord Rama is portrayed here as Chairperson of the temple board, overseeing a meeting of the temple's directors. He reminds them that they are managing God's home in a professional manner for the benefit of His devotees

L A W

Managing a Hindu Temple

Meeting the challenges of operating under American laws and tax codes

BY KATHERINE NANDA, COLORADO, USA
IN AN IDEAL WORLD, GETTING TOGETHER to build an edifice for the worship of God would be a very simple matter of duty and dharma. Until that ideal world is in place, though, we are stuck with one in which the laws of society largely influence the enterprise of temple organization. The better prepared we are to deal with it, the more successfully we can spare ourselves the myriad headaches that often arise for temples in the US today.

The purpose of this article is to alert temple leaders and members to these issues in order that we anticipate the potential problems and thereby avoid or mitigate them. Some of the suggestions here are legal in nature, while many are based on simple common sense. While the discussion centers on

US law, most of the same advice applies in other nations. And, naturally, with regard to a particular temple or situation, it is prudent to consult a lawyer familiar with the facts and circumstances of the specific temple group as well as the law of the particular state. Please note that this article should not be construed as legal advice.

Why incorporate the temple?

There are three goals to keep in mind in establishing a temple organization: first, the organizational structure should serve the stability of the temple, so that, second, the temple can serve the religious and spiritual needs of the community, so that, third, the community can worship and serve God. Of course, there are many models of temple organization, from huge temple complexes

to simple shrine *mandirs* served by a single priestly family, to monastic societies, and everything in between. For any temple, the objectives of holding property and avoiding personal liability of directors are two paramount considerations. Formalizing the entity is critical in doing so. I suggest that incorporation is mandatory.

Incorporation means adopting a formal structure and filing documents with the state's corporation office to recognize the entity. Unincorporated religious organizations are not recommended, as the risk of personal liability is too high, although it may be technically allowed in some states. Specifically, anyone acting on behalf of an unincorporated association may be held personally legally responsible for the debts and liabilities of the association, such as those arising

from contracts or personal injuries.

A temple is generally set up as a not-for-profit or nonprofit corporation under the laws of the state. There is no one set of rules governing all the 50 American states and the District of Columbia, so the temple's own attorney will be the best source of information about this, as well as all other aspects of the operation.

Being a nonprofit corporation means that no one can profit personally from the activity of the temple: any economic activity can only be for the tax-exempt purposes of the temple. The fact that no one can profit does not, of course, mean that the temple cannot pay a reasonable compensation for services rendered, even by directors. If the temple ever closes, all of its remaining assets have to go to another similar organization or they will be taken over by the state. A temple also cannot intervene in political campaigns or employ a substantial part of its activity in attempting to influence legislation.

By incorporating, we formalize the institution of the temple, establishing it as an entity with a certain set of relationships and responsibilities to the community. At that time we create a board of directors or trustees whose obligations to the temple and the community are stated and understood. Incorporation gives members (if the temple has members), donors, the congregation and the community a reason to have confidence in the future of the temple. It sets up a fairly predictable decision-making process, and it protects the directors or trustees from personal exposure for the debts and liabilities of the temple. Even if the temple organization is starting out very small, it should be incorporated from the beginning.

It is also important to take the time to agree on an operating plan that will truly serve the temple's distinct needs. When drawing up these instruments, organizers should work closely with an attorney and be vigilant that nothing is taken for granted. Having rules in place and following them helps to avert conflicts before they arise. The bylaws of an organization are especially important, as they state the details of how it will operate, such as its governing structure, board and officers, election procedures, membership rules and methods for changing all the rules.

The organization need not be set up as a democracy, with each member having an equal say in the election of the board. The Catholic Church, for example, is set up in a way that recognizes its internal hierarchical

nature. A Hindu temple set up under a dominant religious leader can adopt a set of rules and guidelines as a part of the constitution or articles of incorporation and bylaws of the temple that recognize the leader's preeminence in deciding matters of both religious teaching and organization. For example, bylaws of this type of temple organization can provide that its religious leader may appoint all or a certain number of members of the board. Or it may provide that the leader has



Accidents happen: The temple faces several potential sources of lawsuits, most obviously from devotees being hurt on the temple premises. But the actions of temple volunteers in the course of their work or driving temple vehicles can also bring liability.

veto power over all or certain decisions of the board, such as those entailing matters of religious principles. It is also possible to set up the temple with a self-perpetuating board that appoints new board members without a vote of the membership.

A very small temple corporation may consist of two or three directors, and a large one may have dozens, depending upon state rules. One individual's say in a small situation is far greater than on a larger board. The character of the temple and the desires of its organizers and supporters will dictate its organizational framework and personality. In this regard, an organization that depends on public support may also find that it must be open to more inclusive decision-making than a smaller or more specialized one that may be able to function via a more exclusive system.

After incorporating, the temple will be required to observe certain formalities of state law, including the very important annual meeting, which must be held, with formally recorded in minutes kept by the secretary. Although this and other rules might seem to be unnecessary to a small organization, compliance is the best way to protect the corporate good standing and public good faith of the temple. Most states also require corporations to file certain basic information periodically to keep their registration cur-

rent. Failure to do so may result in suspension of the temple's corporate standing. The state also has the authority to suspend any corporation if it violates state law or policy.

Designate the temple as a "church"?

When they hear the word *church*, many people do not realize that under American law and tax codes the term includes the institutions of all types of religious faiths, not just Christian. In fact, the designation of a Hindu temple as a "church" declares the truth of our existence as religious institutions on equal par with all others. We enthusiastically acknowledge our status as members of the rich diversity of the American religious life. A religious organization doesn't have to use the word *church* in its name to be a church. A current example is the Hindu Society of Minnesota, whose new temple suffered extensive vandalism just before it was to open. The temple is a legal church, and its president would occasionally refer to it as "our church" when talking with the media about the attack. The language made it easier for the local people, mostly church-going Christians, to understand the significance of the temple for the Hindus.

After incorporating, most temples in America obtain tax exempt status as a "501(c)(3) organization" (named for the section of the tax code regulating them). The "church" designation can be requested when applying, or later. Section 501(c)(3) status is available to corporations that demonstrate that they are supported by the public for educational, scientific, religious or charitable purposes. Under the 501(c)(3) designation, the temple is exempt from real estate property taxes on land used for religious purposes, from sales tax in some states and can get nonprofit rates for postal mail. As a 501(c)(3), but without the "church" designation, the organization is required to file form 990 with the IRS each year detailing its revenue, expenses and activities, and answering questions about political activities, family or business relationships among directors and employees, etc. The form is public record, available to anyone who requests it. There is also the little-known "corporation sole" structure—see sidebar, page 57.

To be considered a church, the organization must have characteristics such as "recognized creed and form of worship, ... distinct religious history; ordained ministers selected after completing prescribed courses of study; literature of its own; [and] established places of worship" (See *IRS Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Orga-*



Church, American style: An IRS official walks down a row of religious centers. He stamps each "church," as they so qualify under US law, thus keeping the "wall of separation" between church and state

nizations, www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf). Although the Sanatana Dharma does not track these features as closely as some other religious traditions, it is well within the definition, and Hindu places of worship easily qualify as churches. As a church, a temple is not required to file the IRS form 990 annual information returns. A church does not have to disclose finances. And although church records are not entirely inaccessible by the authorities, it is much more difficult for the government to audit a church. The IRS may only initiate a church tax inquiry if the authorities reasonably believe that the organization: (a) may not qualify for the exemption; or (b) may not be paying tax on an unrelated business or other taxable activity.

Board functions and responsibilities

If the temple has a board of directors or trustees, the confidence of the membership in that board depends on its functioning strictly according to its authority. Its highest priority is its fiduciary duty, that is, the special care it must take with the resources and trust of others. Conflicts of interest, self-dealing, willful misconduct, and recklessness are all violations of fiduciary duty and must be strenuously avoided. A system that places great importance on transparency in the board's work will help tremendously.

It is important that the temple board pay close attention to paperwork, for so much depends on written documentation as to the existence, health, financial condition, liabilities and, especially, the accountability

of the temple. A board must always act by way of resolutions—proposed, debated and passed—with the secretary keeping a record in the minutes of every step. By clarifying up front what it intends to do through carefully chosen language in a resolution, the board avoids later conflict and misunderstandings, and the action becomes an official act of the board. It is also a good idea to institute and to follow rules for the conduct of board and membership meetings. These may or may not be included in the bylaws but should be formally adopted by the board. At the same time, temple leaders must be flexible in their leadership styles without being capricious or arrogant.

Members of the temple board should recognize that their membership is a matter of service and responsibility, not status or privilege. They must be actively involved in the temple's life, be interested in solving problems and be able to work with the other members and the temple's management. Accountability to the best interest of the temple must always be the goal of each board member. For instance, the temple must always pay its debts, as the payment of debts is part of the purpose of any organization that serves the public trust. This is an example of accountability to others. The board's accountability to donors and members can be demonstrated through a practice of keeping all books of the temple open for inspection by members and, if necessary, the public, as to salaries, donations, debts, assets, etc. This is an excellent way to preserve the community's trust

in the temple's leadership. Especially in these days of public mistrust, a temple can protect its public image by demonstrating that it is open to scrutiny.

It is especially incumbent upon the temple board to keep the administrative and financial books and records open to reasonable inspection by members and in excellent condition to ensure confidence of the membership and the community. Great care should be taken to avoid financial misconduct by the board, and the best way to accomplish this is to keep the process scrupulously accurate and transparent. Receipts must be given for all donations over \$250 and should be given for donations over \$100.

Above all, it is critical to avoid abusing the eligibility rules for tax exemption. The organization must

be organized and operated exclusively for religious or other charitable purposes; net earnings may not go to benefit any private individual, and the purposes and activities may not be illegal or violate fundamental public policy. And while it might appear to be flouted by many highly visible American religious organizations, perhaps the most stringent rule is the prohibition against attempting to influence legislation or intervening in political campaigns.

Accountability of the board to the temple itself is greatly aided by directors' avoiding any activity that might possibly be a conflict of interest. Temples are particularly susceptible here, because those in positions of authority are so eager to help, including assisting in the many business transactions that keep a temple going. Even when this motivation is above reproach, as it generally is, a profit motive can occasionally come into play—or appear to do so (which may be just as dangerous). And, unfortunately, even situations that begin in good faith can go bad as well, if we are not careful.

An example of a conflict of interest would be a situation where Director X, who has volunteered to get the temple roof repaired, gives his brother-in-law's roofing company the contract at a good price. Later it is discovered that another company would have beat that price if it had been allowed to bid. Of course, it's more common for temple members and directors to give selflessly and without regard for gain in matters concerning their temple, but that makes it even more



KRISANNE JOHNSON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Catholic management: Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane, Washington, the newly elected president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, meets with President Bush in the Oval Office. As bishop, Skylstad is the "corporate sole" of all church properties in the Spokane diocese and answerable to no lay board of trustees.

www.geocities.com/corporatesole/ for more information.

The corporation sole is the model used by the Catholic Church (and some other churches) in many states. In fact, the concept of corporation sole originated with the Catholic Church as far back as the 4th century. It came into American law via English Common Law, under which it was used by the Church of England. In the Catholic system, the bishop or archbishop, as the head of a diocese, owns the Church property in his capacity as "corporate sole." The Catholic Church is a hierarchical organization, strictly following what is known as canon law, which dictates all powers and duties of Church officials, including how

Priest-Owned Temples

How a religious organization can be set up with a priest or spiritual leader in sole control

SOME STATES (16 OR 17) PERMIT THE LITTLE-KNOWN type of entity called a "corporation sole" for churches, which may provide a good format for some small temples. It gives a single individual who is the head of a religious organization, such as a priest, swami or pandit, certain legal capacities and advantages, especially being able to: 1) hold church property in perpetuity, 2) hold church property without subjecting it to personal debts, and 3) protect personal assets from church liabilities. Essentially, the person is the corporation, and when he dies the successor takes his place. So, the corporation-sole temple can exist in perpetuity, just as a major temple can. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, advocated priest-owned temples under the corporation-sole structure. He felt that entire priest communities, such as the Sivacharyas of South India, could establish a network of their own temples in the West. Instead of being underpaid and overworked employees, they could run their own independent temples earning both a good income and respect in the process.

Washington is one of the states that allows corporation sole. Their Revised Code 24.12.010 states, "Any person, being the bishop, overseer or presiding elder of any church or religious denomination in this state, may, in conformity with the constitution, canons, rules, regulations or discipline of such church or denomination, become a corporation sole, in the manner prescribed in this chapter, as nearly as may be; and, thereupon, said bishop, overseer or presiding elder, as the case may be, together with his successors in office or position, by his official designation, shall be held and deemed to be a body corporate, with all the rights and powers prescribed in the case of corporations aggregate; and with all the privileges provided by law for religious corporations." Some other states allowing corporation sole are California, Colorado, Hawaii, Michigan and the two Carolinas. See

decisions are made, how funds are allocated, and how successors are chosen. This structure has been followed by the Catholic Church for generations, and the Internal Revenue Service is perfectly comfortable with it for those reasons. The hierarchical structures present within many guru and priestly lineages, for example, are clear and traditional and should sustain the requirements of the corporation sole.

The IRS states, "A corporation sole may own property and enter into contracts as a natural person, but only for the purposes of the religious entity and not for the individual office holder's personal benefit. Title to property that vests in the office holder as a corporation sole passes not to the office holder's heirs, but to the successors to the office by operation of law."

It should come as no surprise that this type of entity is subject to tremendous abuse. There have been numerous tax scams over the last several years—and they continue today—that promise to protect individuals' personal assets from tax liability. All the person has to do is to claim to be a leader of his own church and file the corporation sole documents in an approving state (usually for a fee to the person promoting the arrangement, of course). In fact, there is no protection for personal assets from tax liability through the corporation sole, and the government stringently prosecutes those who would avoid paying taxes by these means. They do so in order to enforce the underlying rule that the corporation sole exists only for the benefit of the religious entity.

Because of these problems, a corporation sole will obviously raise a red flag with the IRS. But a temple that adheres in good faith to the rules should not have any problems obtaining approval and maintaining good standing. There is a wealth of information on the web regarding the corporation sole, but beware, much of it is produced by scammers, so read carefully and look to the sources. Also, do not be surprised if your otherwise competent attorney has never heard of this corporate form before you mentioned it!

important that not only the conflict but even the appearance of a possible conflict must be avoided. In the roofing illustration, Director X can avoid the conflict by disclosing his relation to the roofing company, telling the board it needs to receive a number of competitive bids and removing himself from consideration of the contract. Then the board is able to weigh all the factors—including the fact that the brother-in-law is a good friend of the temple—before granting the contract to him or another.

As another illustration that is not so obvious, temple fund-raisers often casually suggest to potential donors that their gifts to the temple might be advantageous for their tax situation, without realizing that they are 1) giving unqualified tax advice and 2) in a position of a direct conflict of interest. The conflict is that their unqualified tax advice is being used to encourage the donation. Solicitors should always tell potential donors to obtain independent tax advice.

If board members act with a reasonable standard of care, most states' laws shield them from personal liability. A simple limitation of liability provision in the temple's charter or articles of incorporation will help in giving a sense of security to would-be directors. The most common kinds of liability in temples are claims for personal injuries occurring on temple premises or accidents involving temple automobiles driven by temple employees or volunteers on temple business. Legitimate claims like these are part of doing business and are covered by the temple's ordinary liability insurance. Unfortunately, it is not unheard of for people to name directors individually in an attempt to speed up a settlement. On the other hand, a board that recklessly hires a manager with a known criminal history could, in fact, incur considerable financial difficulty for the temple if the manager causes harm to, say, a festival bystander. To avoid such possibilities, it is wise to work with the temple's insurance agent and attorney to put into place a complete system of risk management steps for the board.

Actual misconduct or gross negligence of board members is not generally covered by a limitation of liability/indemnity clause in the charter or articles of incorporation. If a board member strongly disagrees with a board course of action to such a degree that he feels the board is no longer acting in the best interest of the temple, it is important to create a clear record of the disagreement in order to avoid potential personal risk. He should have his dissent explicitly recorded in the board's minutes.

It is good to remember at all times the fact that a temple board is supporting the religious life of its congregation and that it owes a high duty of care to the temple and its resources. This should be kept in mind even

Transparent accounting: Money should be handled most carefully in the temple, as shown here by the priest counting the day's receipts on the temple floor in front of the Deity and devotees

to the smallest consideration, like accidentally walking off with a pen that belongs to the temple in one's pocket. Maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in our behavior as temple leaders is a minimal ethical requirement to fulfill our service.

Practical Temple Management

In dealing with management, a few good practices will help keep the temple running smoothly and demonstrate integrity for all to see:

- State the manager's authority clearly in terms of the nonprofit purposes of the temple.
- Set out in writing job descriptions, ethics rules and conflict-of-interest prevention policies for board members and officers, management, employees and volunteers.
- Create and work within an annual operating budget and have regular independent financial audits; annually prepare cash flow and income projections and a financial statement.
- Plan fund-raising programs in compliance with the Council of Better Business Bureaus' Standards for Charity Accountability (see www.give.org/standards/newcbbstds.asp).
- Follow a set procedure for hiring and evaluating managers.
- Devise a procedure for reporting and disclosure by the manager to the board on matters such as employment problems, potential or threatened litigation by anyone, illegal or criminal acts of employees and any violence or threats of violence.

If a manager is ineffective, the temple board should take steps proactively to help improve his or her performance before the situation becomes difficult. Likewise, if board members are ineffective or impede the work of the board, the best course is always to strive to improve by discussing, asking questions and seeking to find alternatives with the person involved. Of course, the fact that someone frequently has objections might not mean that the person is just being troublesome. Maybe there are significant problems with how the board operates. The board leaders should be open to considering these matters in light of the mission of the temple and treating everyone concerned with the greatest respect and dignity possible. The process and outcome will thus elevate everyone.

It should be remembered that while the courts are extremely reluctant to look into the internal affairs of a church, this privileged status is not absolute. A court will ac-

cept a dispute that can be decided on "neutral principles of law," such as a real estate or contract matter, in which the temple is acting as a business corporation, even if it may concern purely internal matters, but not with respect to issues where the decision depends on doctrinal matters. While they would refuse to examine whether a priest's qualifications made him unsuitable for hiring, they might consider whether his contract allowed for termination without cause. While they would avoid issues regarding disciplining members for doctrinal reasons, they might look into allegations that certain activities violate the rule against assets benefiting individuals. My advice is to stay out of courts as much as possible by using alternative methods of dispute resolution.

Volunteers

Volunteers are a tremendous asset to a temple and should be treated as such. For their benefit—and the temple's as well—volunteers' duties should be carefully delineated. Set forth the expectations of volunteers in writing and give them clear guidelines for the work to be done. The volunteer should know the extent of the commitment in advance so that there is a clear understanding on both sides. Again, for the protection of all, volunteers should be included in the temple's liability insurance and should be advised to speak with their own insurance agents to determine whether they have any

personal risk that should be covered under their own policies. This particularly applies for those volunteers who drive a temple vehicle or drive their own vehicle on temple business or who work with children. In the process of working to carry out the mission of service to the temple, volunteers do, after all, often have quite a lot of contact with the public. It is a good idea for frequent volunteers to consider buying an inexpensive umbrella policy to supplement their ordinary homeowners' liability policy.

Zoning disputes

There can be nothing so contentious as initially obtaining land for a temple. In 2000, President Clinton signed the Religious Liberty Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which gave religious institutions a special status vis-a-vis local land use regulations. In the past, zoning and planning obstacles could be placed in the way of religious groups meeting in everything from private homes to storefronts and rented theaters to large complexes. It often seemed that this treatment was reserved for minority religions, but Christian groups frequently had the same complaint. Under this new law, government units making land use determinations must treat religious organizations at least equally with secular ones, and cannot exclude or limit religious uses just because they are religious.

This law is in response to neighborhood

conflicts over land use, often the source of difficult disputes and a huge obstacle for many—if not most—new temple projects. While the law is a valuable aid and certainly will help in intractable situations, it is a better idea to take a positive, proactive approach with activities like neighborhood events, open houses, distribution of sweets to neighbors at festival times, and even facilitated meetings where both the temple body and the prospective neighbors can make their feelings known in order to minimize the potential animosity. Forcing the temple's way into the community through legal means found in this act may result in decades of disharmony with the surrounding community.

Conflict resolution

Numerous relationships exist within a temple, between and among the board, the management, the priests, volunteers, donors, members, temple devotees and the outside community. In each combination there is the potential for disagreements, disputes and full-blown conflict. I strongly recommend that difficulties affecting any of these relationships be handled first through a type of process called "alternative dispute resolution" or "ADR." These are methods other than the system of lawyers and courts. The most widely used methods are mediation and arbitration.

Litigation, unfortunately, seems to bring out the worst in people, is costly, and tends

to freeze people's positions, leaving little chance of reaching a truly amicable resolution or settlement. ADR, on the other hand, is a way of resolving disputes that honors both sides and aims to reach a win-win solution. It is a good idea to include a clause providing for disputes to be submitted to arbitration or mediation in all organizational documents, including bylaws, as well as in all contracts and agreements to which the temple is a party. In this process, which is less formal than litigation, a religious elder or other individual respected by both parties may act as the arbitrator/mediator, or it can be done by a person trained in ADR. The American Arbitration Association (AAA) has offices in most every city and has experienced people who will get acquainted with the basic facts of the situation and then allow both sides to present their case as part of the process of arbitration or mediation. Temple leaders should be comfortable calling upon them to assist when there are disputes, for the mutual benefit of all involved. The AAA has guidelines for "Drafting Dispute Resolution Clauses" at www.adr.org.

In conclusion

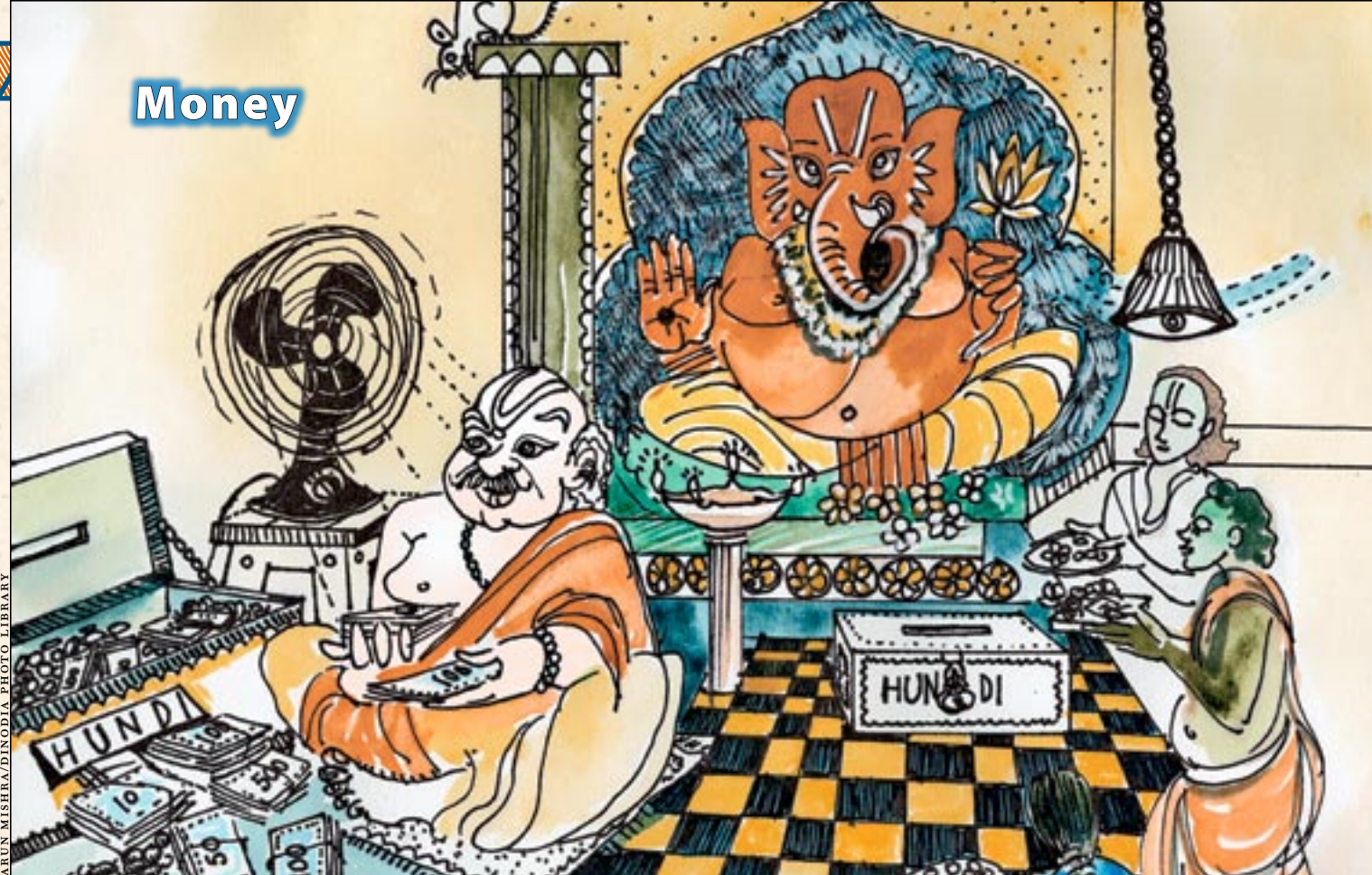
Temples generally operate without problems. People work together smoothly to serve God and the congregation, but difficulties can arise, so it is advisable to prepare for such difficulties in advance. To protect the assets of the temple is the first responsibility of those involved in temple work. It is thus important to be up front. Don't shy away from these issues because they embarrass you or make you uncomfortable. Set up the rules by which everyone will play and then follow them yourself most carefully. Keep in mind the tremendous responsibilities entailed in operating a public institution and ensure that they will all be adequately met.

As you may know, the US is perceived as a highly litigious society. But there is another reason for stressing, as I have, this strict way of doing business in your temple. It is common for US temples to be built with the contributions of a large number of people and with broad public interest. There is a lot at stake. Notwithstanding the nature of our own personal involvement in temple work, the mission must be unaffected. Remember, the temple is the place where we leave our egos at the door seeking darshan and to worship God.



Katherine Nanda, now retired, practiced in a number of fields of law in Colorado for almost 20 years. She was a founding member of the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center of the Rockies near Denver, Colorado, USA.

Money



Saving our Scriptures

SCRIPTURES

French Institute holds the world's largest collection of Saiva holy texts

“JUST CANNOT SIT IDLE,” SAYS S. SAMBANDA SIVACHARYAR OF CUDDALORE. “One day, if I don’t read or see a manuscript, that day I shall be very uncomfortable.” The white-bearded, wisened Sivacharyar has been with the French Institute of Pondicherry for 37 years, purchasing, organizing, cataloging and assisting with the critical editing and translation of ancient Saiva manuscripts. Even at 79, having authored five books on temple rituals himself, he’s not ready to retire. There is much work yet to be done to preserve and bring forth tens of thousands of texts which record the ritual and philosophical knowledge that has been locked within his Adisaiva priest tradition for millennia.

The French Institute of Pondicherry is a research institute of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Most of the Institute’s activities fall into the areas of social sciences and ecology. The Indology department is working to preserve the subcontinent’s extraordinary heritage of ancient religious manuscripts, one of only a handful of such bodies in the world.

The collection began in 1955, shortly after the Institute’s founding, when Dr. Jean

Filliozat, late founder-director of the Institute and director of the French School of the Far East, wished to explain the Hindu temple and what happens in it. He set out to collect as many of the materials he could find relating to South India’s rich Saivite tradition. Pandit N.R. Bhatt, 81, a scholar of the French School and now retired head of Indology at the Institute, spearheaded the collection effort in the late ‘50s. The manuscripts were gathered from private collections of temples, priests and monasteries across South India. Bhatt scoured the Tamil countryside for Saiva manuscripts, sometimes bringing back entire collections that included many other categories of texts as well.

The Adisaivas, Tamil Nadu’s hereditary clan of Sivacharya temple priests, trustingly sold and sometimes gifted manuscripts, mostly in the form of palm-leaf bundles, which had been in their families for centuries. Sambanda Sivacharyar recalls, “In 1975, a priest in Chennai who was so poor willingly gave us a bag full of manuscripts unconditionally.” The Institute’s promise in return was to carefully protect and preserve, and eventually transcribe and translate, it all.

The Institute now has about 8,600 manu-

scripts transmitting approximately 60,000 texts. Jointly with the French School of the Far East, the total collection of over 11,000 manuscripts includes the world’s largest assemblage of texts of Hinduism’s Saiva Siddhanta tradition. More than half of these are *Saiva Agamas*, honored along with the *Vedas* as Hinduism’s revealed scriptures, and *pad-dhatis*, ritual manuals based on the *Agamas*.

Included in the collection are significant numbers of devotional hymns and legends about holy places, Vedic astrology texts, epics, myths and legends, traditional medical texts, *Vedas* and other literary works. Among the manuscripts, 6,850 are written in Sanskrit, 1,200 in Tamil, with others in Tulu, Telugu, Malayalam, Manipravalam (a combination of Malayalam and Sanskrit) and Kannada. The Sanskrit texts are inscribed in all of the nine Indian scripts used to write Sanskrit: Devanagari, Grantha, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Nandinagari, Sarada (Kashmiri), Tulu and Nepali. In addition to plain text, there are Oriya manuscripts that have abundant drawings and diagrams. Some Tamil manuscripts show yantras, and a few Malayalam manuscripts show illustrations of the human body.

Of palm leaves and people: (Left) Vimalanathan peruses palm-leaf bundles in the air-conditioned storage room. (Right) The manuscripts come in many shapes and sizes. (Middle left) Vimalanathan applies lemongrass oil to the leaves to deter insects. (Middle right) Two of the smallest palm-leaf bundles. (Below) Sambanda Sivacharyar and translator T. Ganesan with the Institute’s published Agama translations.

Most of the manuscripts—8,187, to be exact—are in the form of palm-leaf bundles as much as three centuries old. In addition to the palm-leaf bundles, there are 360 paper codices and 1,144 recent paper transcripts, hand copies of palm leaves that were made when the owners wouldn’t allow the leaves themselves to be taken.

The palm leaves come in a range of sizes, from the *Ramayana Aaroodam* at just a few inches across to one on the *Saiva Agamas* at 45 inches long. These leaves, onto which letters are incised with a stylus, can deteriorate quickly in South India’s climate. Many of them are perforated with holes left by insect larvae. They are so fragile that they are damaged each time they are handled; pieces break off, sometimes carrying with them fragments of writing. In an effort to preserve the leaves as long as possible, the collection’s unsung hero, Vimalanathan, spent two years methodically brushing them free of insect debris, applying lemongrass oil and placing the leaves in the hot sun to dry before restacking them.

Since the effort began in the 1950s, the Institute has published thirteen books translating seven of the 28 *Saiva Agamas* into French. More translations are underway, but the bulk of the department’s energy is currently being consumed in an effort to digitally photograph and catalog the entire manuscript collection. This is no easy task. Describing the texts contained in the manuscripts is difficult and tedious, considering that a single palm-leaf bundle can contain dozens of texts. The tiny letters are typically engraved without spaces between words or between where one text ends and another begins. There is not even any emphasis to indicate chapter titles.

Thus, this process is a slow one, requiring not only great physical care but intimate familiarity with Sanskrit scriptures. The Institute’s goal is to make the collection available in a searchable online database for anyone researching Saiva religion and philosophy. A pilot CD entitled “Parampara” was released in 1999. The first complete section of the catalog, covering the 1,144 paper transcripts, is to be published on the web by the end of 2006. Indeed, after 50 years of effort, the bulk of the project is yet to be done.

With Kesava Mallia, Hyderabad, India

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.IFPINDIA.ORG



Russian Vegetarianism?

Famous for its meat and potatoes, the country has a real style with veggies—and here are two recipes

BY JANE SRIVASTAVA, USA

A JOKE FROM MY BIRTHPLACE GOES something like this: Someone not familiar with Russia asks a Russian: “Are there any vegetarians in Russia?”

To which the Russian responds: “I personally don’t know any, but those who tried it have not survived.” This joke rings true because for many years it had been virtually impossible for Russians to be vegetarians. The Soviet regime considered vegetarianism a pseudoscientific and bourgeois theory that contravened Soviet ideology. They severely persecuted followers of vegetarian lifestyles. During Soviet times, due to the year-round shortage of food of any kind, people simply could not survive on vegetarian diets.

The idea of abstention from meat is not foreign to the Russians. Before the Revolution of 1917, the majority of Russians observed Orthodox Christian traditional fasts, which excluded meat. In 1901, the first vegetarian society opened in Saint Petersburg. In the following years, nine other vegetarian societies were founded that carried out a variety of activities. They opened vegetarian restaurants and cafes in many cities, operated vegetarian hospitals, published vegetarian newspapers and magazines. Among some of the famous Russian vegetarians of the end of 19th, beginning of the 20th, centuries were writers Leo Tolstoy and Ivan Bunin, composer Alexander Scriabin and painter Isaac Levitan. Tolstoy, incidentally, carried on a lengthy and influential correspondence with the young Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. Gandhi, in fact, used his ideas to found Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, which served as a training ground for the passive resistance movement (see www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/people/gandhi/bhana.html).

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, interest in vegetarianism and the number of vegetarians have continued to rise. The new Russia offers freedom and the link to the rest of the world that citizens had not experienced for over 70 years. Several vegetar-

ian societies have been created to promote healthy lifestyles and oppose animal killing. All-vegetarian restaurants can now be found in big cities, such as Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and Vladivostok. Supermarkets of the



Buttermilk and apple oladyi: These small pancakes are served with jam and sour cream

new Russia carry a variety of vegetables year-round that make it possible to maintain a non-meat lifestyle.

Many Russians have discovered vegetarianism as part of their interest in Eastern religions and philosophy, which are gaining popularity among the Russians. Some have chosen not to eat meat in their desire to achieve optimal health. Others do so just because it is fashionable. Whatever the motivation, vegetarian lifestyle is not affordable to everyone. A poll conducted by Eurasian Vegetarian Society (founded in 2001) learned that most vegetarians are among the intelligentsia and the wealthy. Manual laborers, retired and the poor have the least interest in vegetarian lifestyle, or means too meager to adopt it.

Still, there are currently precious few vegetarians in Russia. The majority of Russians are still skeptical about vegetarians and vegetarian lifestyle, and new vegetarians often do not find support and understanding from their friends and family. Many Russians think that voluntarily foregoing meat is crazy and may even harm your health. It’s not easy to be Russian and vegetarian when the rest of the community offers you a cold shoulder. Moskovite veggies are in need of support and encouragement of their lifestyle.

Visitors to Russia should not expect many vegetarian choices in most restaurants and private fares. You can find a list of Moscow vegetarian restaurants at www.unclepasha.com/vegetarian_russia.htm. One is the upscale, pure vegetarian restaurant “Avocado” on Chistoprudny Boulevard, with mostly Russian cuisine.

The traditional Russian table offers plenty of wonderful vegetable-based dishes. However, the unique meat and fish dishes are still essential to any spread. In fact, to most Russians, absence of meat on the table is considered a sign of poverty or inhospitality. Travelers who are willing to cook their own meals will find in local supermarkets most of the necessary ingredients to whip up a vegetarian meal.

In my own kitchen in the United States, I utilize the best of the cuisines I grew up with—Russian, Jewish and Lithuanian—and, to accommodate my husband, recently acquired Indian cooking skills. My interest in Indian culture, religion and cuisine led me to re-examine my eating habits. As a result, I started to make more healthful vegetable, grain and legume dishes, while at the same time experimenting with the recipes I grew up with. I want to share some of my favorite healthy and easy recipes with HT readers.

The first is that quintessential Russian dish, borscht, a beet soup. The traditional version calls for a meat base, but my vegetarian variant of this winter soup is just as flavorful. The ingredients are: three or four medium-sized beets, peeled and grated; four grated carrots, one thinly sliced onion, two thinly cut medium potatoes, one shredded small head of cabbage, three tablespoons each of ketchup and tomato paste, a half teaspoon of sugar, a small bunch of dill, oil, salt and pepper.

Cook the potatoes and cabbage until tender in six to eight cups of boiling water or prepared vegetable stock. Saute the onions, beets and carrots on medium heat for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. When the vegetables take on a nice aroma, add ketchup, tomato paste, dill, salt, black pep-

per and sugar. Turn to coat well, then add to the cooked potatoes and cabbage. Serve garnished with sour cream and dark-rye bread. Makes about six servings.

The next recipe is for buttermilk and apple *oladyi*. Russian pancakes are of two kinds: *oladyi* (similar to the American pancakes but smaller in size) and blini (similar to crepes). The ingredients are one cup plus two tablespoons of all-purpose flour, two cups of buttermilk, one teaspoon of corn meal, one apple, a quarter-cup raisins, one-half tablespoon of sugar, a pinch of baking soda and salt, and oil or ghee for frying.

Pour buttermilk into a bowl. Grate one large peeled apple into the buttermilk. Add sugar, raisins, a pinch of baking soda and all

Hot beet borscht: This winter soup is Russia’s most famous dish

the flour to make the consistency of thick sour cream. Stir well. Heat about four tablespoons of oil in a large frying pan. There should be enough oil that the *oladyi* don’t stick. When the pan is hot, take a tablespoon and make several three-inch pancakes, cook and turn several times until golden brown. Add more oil as you put on a new batch of pancakes. If you have enough oil in the pan, but can’t turn the pancakes or they stick, you will probably need to add the flour to the mixture. This makes about 15 *oladyi*. Serve with jam and a dollop of sour cream. *Priyatnogo appetita!*



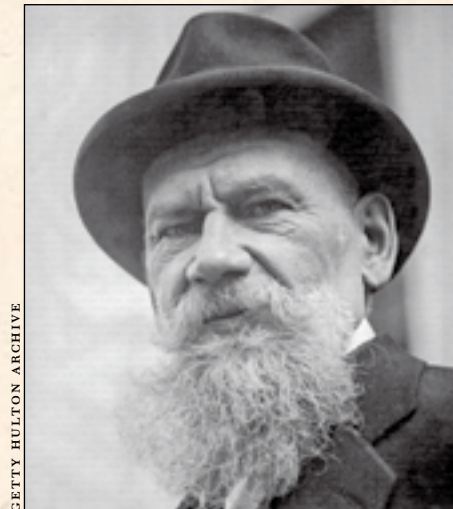
Tolstoy’s 19th Century Vegetarian Crusade

The following article is excerpted from the address of Valentin Bulgakov to the 8th World Vegetarian Congress held in Berlin and Hamburg, Germany, in 1932 (posted at www.ivu.org/congress/wvc32/bulgakov.html). Bulgakov was at one time Tolstoy’s private secretary. It is translated from a summary of the talk given in Russian and published in The Vegetarian News (London), September, 1932.

IT IS NOW FOUR YEARS SINCE THE centenary of the birth of Leo Tolstoy, who certainly must be accounted one of the great ones of the earth, was celebrated. During the last twenty-three years of his life he was a vegetarian and, by reason of his great fame and moral authority, he has done great service to the vegetarian movement.

He understood thoroughly the hygienic grounds for vegetarianism, but it was not for such reasons that he became a vegetarian. Most assuredly, it was the ethical standpoint that influenced him. Nor was the idea that was in his mind either detached or isolated. On the contrary, that idea was essentially associated with his world outlook, that outlook, perhaps, being most correctly summarized in all that is expressed in the word *humane*. Tolstoy always declared that he was a Christian, by which he meant he had no new teaching to promulgate, his business being simply to translate the teachings of the gospels into modern speech and practice. Man, he held, though confined within the limits of the flesh, yet remains the expression of an eternal Principle. In a word, he is a son of God, and by inference all men are brothers. The natural bond between them is the bond of love, and this should extend also to all living creatures. One and the same “soul” is common to all; and, realizing this, it becomes impossible that men should either slay or hurt animals. The publication of Tolstoy’s essay, “The First Step” had a quite staggering effect upon the Russian society of his day, many fine and sensitive people thus becoming vegetarians.

Tolstoy felt very keenly the absolute inhumanity of eating flesh, and on one occasion (as has so often been told), by way



Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910): The renowned author of War and Peace and Anna Karenina

of clinching an argument with a sister-in-law who was a confirmed flesh-eater ordered a live fowl to be tied near her place at the luncheon table and called for a plate and large knife likewise to be provided, whereupon he proceeded to address her somewhat as follows: “We all know, dear one, how fond you are of flesh, and we should like to provide you with what you wish, but the difficulty is that none of us can bring himself to slay the bird for you. Therefore, there seems to be no other way but to ask that you should do it for yourself.” His guest, however, who was much perturbed, could not bring herself to do as was suggested and was obliged, for that occasion at least, to deny herself the right to eat flesh, which she had hitherto so vehemently claimed to be her due.

The friends and followers of Tolstoy played a great part in the work of the Moscow Vegetarian Society; but the whole of its possessions were confiscated three years ago in 1929 by the Soviet Government, and today in Russia there is no organized vegetarian movement. So weak, it seems, is the position of the dictator that even the vegetarian idea is accounted dangerous! Russian vegetarians, amid all their difficulties, yet continue to show a spirit of “victorious earnestness.”

Many economic communities were also established by followers of Tolstoy, but, finally, I must tell you something about the Doukhobors, a people (the name means “warriors of the spirit”) whose existence, as a following, goes back even to the middle of the eighteenth century. The Doukhobors are, in fact, a Christian peasant society, existing without the fold of the Church, whose message received an added strength by reason of the influx of the teaching of Tolstoy, the whole society in 1890, under the direct influence of one Peter Werigin by name, electing to become vegetarians. In 1898, under the Russian regime at that time, and with the direct assistance of Tolstoy, about 8,000 Doukhobors decided to migrate to Canada, where their numbers have since grown to about 15,000—all, with but few exceptions, still being vegetarians.

A Parent's Essential Skill: Storytelling

With stories, you can teach your children, in their developing years, the art and craft of life

BY RAMA DEVAGUPTA

MY FATHER WAS NEVER trained as a professional storyteller; he is a retired engineer. And yet, some of my fondest childhood memories and valuable learning experiences can be traced to the innumerable stories my father narrated to me as a child and teenager. It did not matter what day of the week or what time of night it was. Besides the daily morning routine, where he would tell a story while getting ready for work, whenever there was a moral to be conveyed, a painful lesson to be learned, after my mother's questioning and reprimanding was over, my father would amazingly narrate a story whose characters, by some strange quirk of fate, also happened to be encountering questions, frustrations and dilemmas similar to mine.

Often, by the end of the story, even as a child, I'd gain a new perspective regarding my feelings and emotions, and come out with a deeper understanding of the next step of action. Modern psychologists might very well state that listening to parables, legends and fables allowed me to come to terms with my own "case history" with feelings of renewed spontaneity, creative problem-solving and wonder.

"Children learn best when they are unaware of the fact that they are being taught," explains my master, Shri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari (affectionately known as Chariji), the president of Shri Ram Chandra Mission and spiritual guide for Sahaj Marg meditation practitioners. "That is why play, perhaps, is so intimately intertwined with the teaching process. Children learn practically all they are ever going to learn within the first six or seven years of their lives."

It is, therefore, no wonder that storytelling has been employed as a powerful tool



throughout the centuries—by parents, grandparents, teachers, educators, saints and seers. In fact, storytelling has been part and parcel of mankind since the beginning of time—from the days of petrography utilized by prehistoric cave-dwellers to CD-ROMs created by computer scientists for kids growing up in the modern era.

"When did we first get exposed to the presence of a

higher power in our life?" we might occasionally wonder. Walking down the obscure road of foggy, distant memories, we may eventually recognize that, in all likelihood, our first exposure to God, to religion and to spirituality started from a tale narrated by a parent or grandparent at bedtime. For instance, the Hindu psyche has imbibed its knowledge and insights from the deep treasure chest of *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*. Native Americans draw inspiration from their vast storehouse of oral folklore. Buddhist teachers reveal the timeless wisdom hidden in Zen stories and Jataka tales. Islam depends on its wealthy inheritance of stories from Sufi scholars and saints. Judaism draws its richness from Hasidic examples as well as Biblical histories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job and others. In Christianity, the *New Testament* describes how Jesus taught the masses in parables, and reserved the esoteric teaching for his disciples when they were away from the crowds.

Augusta Baker and Ellin Greene, authors of *Storytelling: Art and Technique*, speak about the need for this craft in simple, everyday language. "Storytelling brings to the listeners heightened awareness," they say, "a sense of wonder, of mystery, of reverence for life."

Joseph Campbell, the world-renowned scholar of mythology, states pithily, "The folktale is the primer of the picture-lan-



Never outgrown: In Hindu culture, storytelling isn't only important for our children, but is a means of communicating the deeper concepts, principles and values of our religion and culture—as well as practical advice—throughout their formative years.

guage of the soul." In *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*, Thomas Moore writes: "Storytelling is an excellent way of caring for the soul. It helps us see the themes that circle in our lives, the deep themes that tell the myths we live."

In *Stories to Nourish the Hearts of Our Children*, contemporary storyteller Laura Simms shares from her professional and personal experience: "Listening to a story is a dynamic process that delights children while allowing them to imagine themselves in a variety of situations. Stories are non-didactic teaching tools. A story heard is not an explanation, but an experience that is enduring and enriching. Each child personally integrates the story, embodying the characters and experiencing the events."

"Stories contain seeds of healing," she adds, "and telling them encourages growth and rejuvenation. Storytelling is an ancient

method that has always served to bring people together and to stimulate creative imagination, wisdom and compassion."

Unfortunately, the fabric of today's society is woven together by nuclear families consisting of over-exhausted fathers and mothers, and its tapestry is strewn with the complexities of modern technology and gadgets. Consequently, it is not surprising that stressful parents have little time and no energy to spare, and are unable to live in the present and enjoy the laughter from the oral tradition. Even the little ones do not have the freedom to indulge in the make-believe world of dressing up, play acting and fantasy games. In order to get a head start and be one step ahead in tomorrow's rat race, more and more youngsters are being sent to preschools and kindergarten at a ridiculously young age—victims of "the hurried childhood syndrome." Additionally, due to the indiscriminate exposure to cable television, videos, DVDs and computer games, the youth in developed as well as developing world nations are facing a major crisis of values.

"Modern life has deprived the younger generation of access to the fairy tales of yester years," laments Shri Rajagopalachari in *Down Memory Lane*. "They were entrancing beyond belief. But their greatest value lay not in their charm, but in their ability to give children, during their formative years, a permanent foundation of value systems which they absorbed without being aware of the fact that they were learning the most profound values of life. And since such values were implanted deep into the child's inner core of the developing human being, those values remained, to be called upon later in life in the form of hidden reserves of strength and fortitude, when the now-grown-up adult faced temptations or trying situations in actual life."

One can safely conclude that the loss of morals and ethics is a clear reflection of the diminishing importance given to folktales, myths and legends in our fast-food culture and life in the high-speed lane. One way or another, we have to learn to simplify our lives and attend to our inner growth and nurture the spiritual development of our children.

Drawing attention to the timeless wisdom inherited from the collective human experience in myths and symbols, and stressing the importance of reading myths, Joseph Campbell explains how "they teach you that you can turn inward, and you begin to get the message of the symbols." He suggests that we ought to "read other people's myths, not those of your own religion, because you tend to interpret your own religion in terms of facts—but if you read the other ones, you begin to get the message. Myth helps you to put your mind in touch with this experience of being alive."

When I was a child, little did I realize the importance of storytelling in my life! Neither

did I know that reading and telling stories would eventually become an integral part of my parenting philosophy and style. My eleven-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter have been exposed to myths, fables, legends, folktales and spiritual stories from birth. The very first piece of music my son heard a few hours after coming into this world was the heartfelt devotional rendition of the *Ramcharitmanas* by the late Indian singer Mukesh—thanks to the audiotapes I had deliberately packed in the maternity bag for

my hospital stay. Ever since, it has become a daily ritual in our house to share stories from mythology and scriptures at bedtime.

During the last decade, I have observed my children responding to storytellers and readers with varied reactions—ranging from interest and rapt attention to passiveness and plain disinterest—at school, in the libraries and in the comfort of our home. Watching their love for stories, I am nostalgically reminded of my father's gift for storytelling and the role that mythology and folktales

played in my self-development. As Joseph Campbell claims, these stories became the launching pad for my spiritual journey, as the writers and narrators had a clear, unmistakable goal in sight: to evoke inspiration and deeper thinking in the young listener's heart and mind.

RAMA DEVAGUPTA, PH.D., IS A FULL-TIME MOTHER AND FREELANCE WRITER. SHE HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN HINDUISM TODAY, PARABOLA, YOGA INTERNATIONAL, U: YOU CAN CHANGE THE WORLD, TRI-CITY HERALD, CONSTANT REMEMBRANCE, THE NEW TIMES, SIRS RENAISSANCE AND ASCENT. SHE MAY BE REACHED AT RAMA_DEVAGUPTA@MSN.COM.

Storytelling: A Dozen Practical Tips

IN LIGHT OF THE WISE words of scholars and spiritual teachers in my story above, I hope parents will find it worthwhile to reflect on the significance of the art and craft of storytelling for the benefit of the younger generation. I hope parents will try to claim the torch of storytelling by following a few of the tips listed below. At one time or another, I have used them myself and it has been an enjoyable experience for me and my children.

1) Read the story for yourself before you read it to the child. Absorb it, digest it and try to capture not just its moral, but also its essence.

2) Know the story well so that if you are interrupted, you can jump back into it comfortably.

3) Identify yourself mentally with the child. Listen to the story with a child's ears and see how you might make it more appealing. Feel free to adapt and revise depending on the age of your child.

4) Don't use a monotonous voice. Polish up your tone and style with some drama.

5) Allow yourself to get into the heart of the characters to make the tale come alive. It is important for the child to identify with the emotions and feelings of the characters.

6) Be natural. Allow the story to flow through you. For smaller children, facial expressions and hand movements used in a spontaneous, creative way evoke an en-

thusiastic response. Simple gestures, like a sparkle in the eyes, happy smile, anger or sadness in the voice, can successfully recreate the story's original atmosphere.

7) You are not giving a performance for a critical adult audience. Don't be stiff-necked and self-conscious, worried about appearing silly. Your prime objective should be to narrate in a pleasurable manner.

8) Some story books come with commentaries. Do not read the commentaries to young children as they might sound like a lecture. Mention the moral in fleeting reference. Wait for them to ask questions and when they do, guide them in their thinking.

9) Allow time and space for a dialogue with your children to instill the higher values of life. Reflection doesn't have to take place immediately after completing the reading; it can be done during the ordinary moments of your family life, during garden work, an evening walk or even at dinner time.

10) Sincerity is important in stories that deal with ethics and spirituality. The slightest

hint of adult scepticism, and children will see through it immediately. Remember the power of thought: Your demeanor will radiate whatever you feel—whether it be faith or cynicism.

11) Learn to live in the moment. Consider why we love reading the stories narrated by spiritual masters like Buddha and Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa with such enchantment. It is due to their simplicity, faith and surrender to the Divine.

12) Shri Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur, affectionately known as Babuji, the founder president of Shri Ram Chandra Mission, once said: "Spirituality is a science of wonder" and "Doubt is a poison for the will." So let us remember to read these spiritual adventures with a feeling of wonder, narrate them with wonder, and somewhere along the way, we would have taught our children the art and craft of living a well-integrated, balanced, happy life.



Story-telling friends: The author's children, Sriram and Shanta (at right) with their friend Mukti and their favorite auntie, Prashaanti, at the Richland Public Library during children's storytime.

COMMENTARY

God on My Desktop

Moving to America didn't mean I had to leave my favorite Deities and festivals behind in India

BY KAUSALYA SAPTHARISHI

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, GOD ALWAYS PLAYED AN integral part in my traditional Tamil brahmin upbringing in Delhi. I would wake up to the sound of tinkling bells emanating from our shrine room where my parents would be seated on cane mats reciting aloud Sanskrit chants and offering fresh flowers before a bevy of Gods, the morning sun adding even more dazzle to the Deities' ornamental glory.

When I would come back from school, the lingering redolence of incense from the day's puja worship would tickle my nostrils even before the delectable aroma of the special dishes to be offered in the worship, such as *payasam* and *kesari* from my mother's kitchen, could enslave my olfactory senses.

In my devout Hindu family, not a day passed without a puja, not a week elapsed without at least one visit to temples and not a month went by without marking some festival or other on the Tamil Hindu calendar. By the time I hit my teens, in addition to popular festivals such as Janmashtami, I was also able to rattle off the names of numerous lesser-known religious occasions such as Karadayan Nombu (observed by married women for the longevity of their husbands) or Maavilakku (for the prosperity of the family). Just a glance at the special dishes being prepared for a specific puja was enough for me to guess the festival being celebrated. For instance, *ezhu thaan kootu*—a stew prepared with seven vegetables—meant it was Thiruvadarai in honor of Lord Siva, or the pointed tips of glistening sweet *modakams* signaled the arrival of Ganesh Chaturthi.

My grandparents and parents never lost an opportunity to teach me new chants, explaining the significance of each and the God for whom it must be recited. I understood that each God has specific powers in the celestial space: Ganesha removes obstacles, Lakshmi showers wealth, Hanuman gives prowess, Siva blesses women with good husbands, and so on. Such constant familiarity with God had me sometimes grumbling to my parents about going to temples more often than necessary. And it wasn't as if I saw a simultaneous reflection of rewards from the heavens in return for my dutiful religious actions, such as inscribing "Shri Ramajayam" in Sanskrit atop a letter addressed to my grandmother. My faith in the almighty was especially shaken when I once flunked math in spite of memorizing the difficult Shyamaladandakam, the powerful Sanskrit chant for Saraswati that assures success in academics. Once again I questioned the existence of Gods when my pimples didn't miraculously disappear after a dip in the holy Ganges in Haridwar. I only hope, to this day, that I had better luck with my sins.

My protests about my family's overly religious ways came to an abrupt halt when I moved to the US. Suddenly, there were no bells to wake me up, lighting incense sticks became bothersome due to the sensitive smoke alarm in the apartment, and the nearest "temple" was a distant sixty miles away. To make matters worse, I was in for a disappointment when I first saw the "Hindu Cultural Center," which didn't boast of any statuesque Chola-type temple architecture replete with ornate entrance towers. I learned

that it was formerly someone's house and that most Hindu temples in the US bear architectural affinity to this one. It also frustrated me that I had to increasingly depend on long-distance phone calls to my family and friendly e-mail reminders from my mother to alert me to the arrival of each of those festivities I had once taken for granted. Let's just say that it was a humbling experience for me and a tad amusing for my parents, who saw a deeply religious side of their daughter surface on a different continent.

Within a few months of my newfound spiritual awakening on foreign shores, I realized the need to connect with God in ways my parents had taught me to. I set up a small puja space in the bedroom, visited the temple as often as I could and recited all those chants with alarming regularity. But this wasn't enough to nourish me spiritually.

Now in the US, in the absence of my folks' guiding presence to veer my religious destiny, my hunger for finding God led me to rediscovering Him on the Internet. It all started with my Googling "Saibaba," which took me to the home page



of the Shirdi Saibaba web site (www.saibaba.org), where not only did I have His *darshan* (sight of the divine), but was also treated to melodious Saibaba hymns. For a divine moment I was magically transported to the Shirdi shrine in Nasik, Maharashtra—which I have visited in the past—but this time minus the meandering queues leading up to his enshrined statue.

This e-experience had me hooked. And still has, in my seventh year in the US. It's like fast food for the soul. Whenever I am in the mood for having a darshan of a particular God, all I have to do is Google His name. The God of my preference lights up my computer screen with a click of the mouse and I don't even have to struggle for His glimpse like in an actual temple. I take my own time savoring the beauteous image of Balaji and His two consorts on Tirupati's official web site (www.tirumala.org) without having to bother with jostling crowds and strict temple authorities interrupting my darshan as they generally do in the Tirupati Devasthanam.

My e-pilgrimages not only take me to temples I have never visited, but also offer added privileges, like allowing me to partake in real-time worship and order special pujas of my choice—all from the convenience of my laptop. Moreover, unlike real temples, these e-darshans are accessible 24/7, paying scant heed to God's noon-time or late-night rest requirements. However, I do make it a point to remove my footwear before I enter God's online sanctum sanctorum. There are no shortcuts for some habits.

My parents are now so accustomed to my online temple visits that they occasionally advise me to go to a particular Deity's web site for adding to my treasury of *punya*, religious merit. Like the other day, my mother told me to visit Garbaratchambikai Devi's web site (www.garbaratchambikai.com) to seek Her blessings for progeny. The Goddess, who is known to grant children to couples, is now on my favorite lists. While vacationing in India, I no longer take my temple visits for granted. I genuinely feel happy to go "temple-hopping" (the term used by my amused husband) with my parents and feel equally blessed to see God on my desktop when I return to the US.

KAUSALYA SAPTHARISHI is a freelance journalist living in New Jersey with her husband. She is grateful to the Internet for bringing her closer to God.

HISTORY

Mahenjodaro and Harappan Civilizations, Alive on the Web!

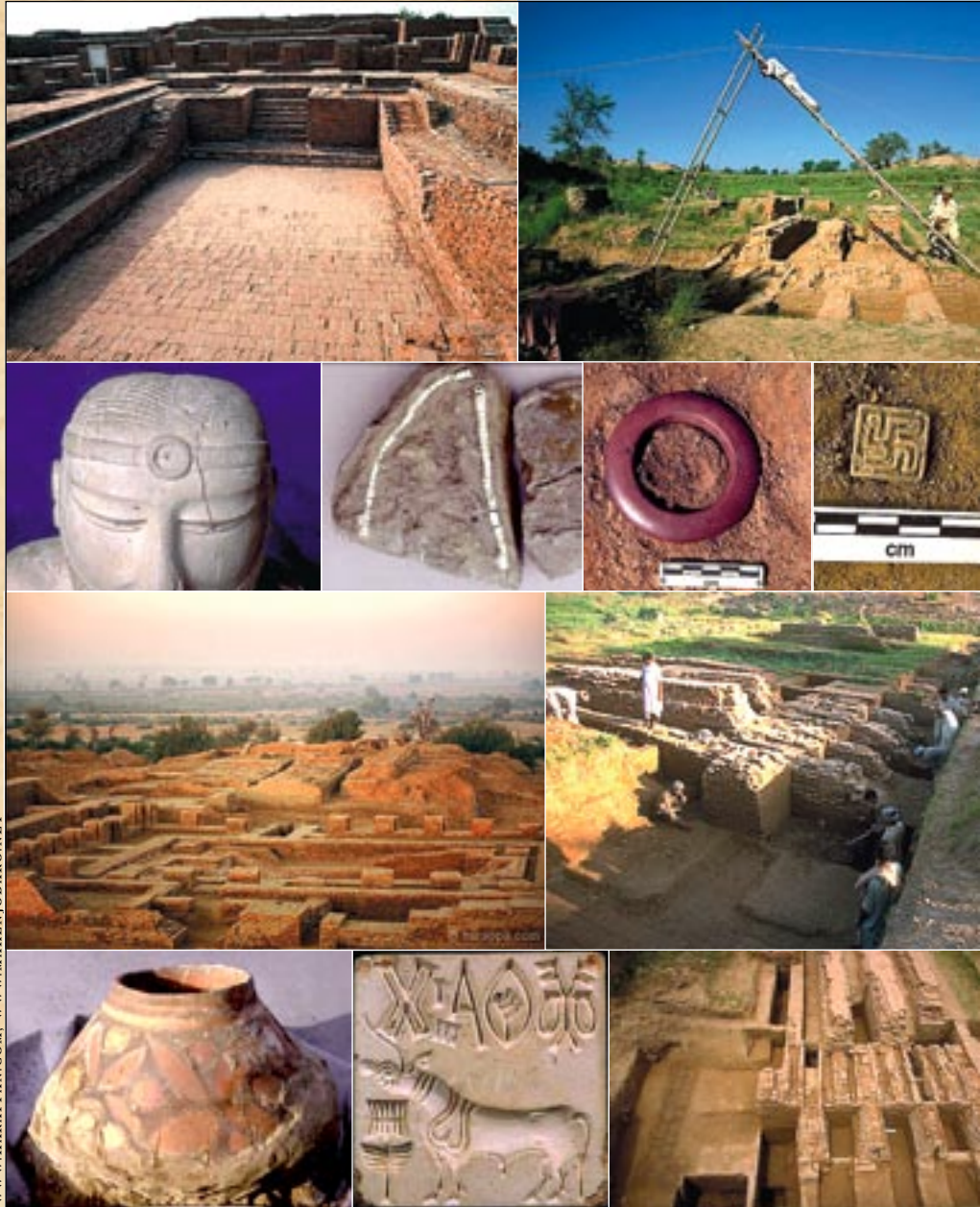
WITH ALL THE DEBATE OVER ANCIENT Indian history, you may have wondered, "What do we really know about the ancient Indus civilizations?" Well, thanks to the years of dedication and sacrifice by archeologists and a competent web team an historical "revelation" awaits you at www.harappa.com and its sister site www.mohenjodaro.net.

Does history normally put you to sleep? Well, this could be your wake-up call. These sites may get your heart pounding, unfolding a remarkable ancient civilization and a fascinating tale of discovery. The two cities of this 5,000-year-old civilization, located in what is now Pakistan, come alive with flash movies, sound bites, 2,151 substantive web pages with images, essays and movies. Did you know that the city of Harappa, started around 3300 BCE and had an estimated 40,000 population?

If the Aryan Invasion debate gets a bit heavy at times, you will find these sites refreshingly free of opinions on the subject. For those, see www.archaeology-online.net.

Meanwhile, here is just a tiny glimpse of images offered at these sites [left to right, top to bottom:] the great bath of Mohenjodaro, 12 meters long, 7 meters wide, 2.4 meters deep; Richard Meadow photographs the "Great Granary;" the famous Mohenjodaro "priest-king" sculpture with "eye bead" ornament; Harappan steatite bead necklace fragments, fired and glazed, ca. 3100 BCE; stoneware bangle; faience swastika button seal; Mohenjodaro bath and "granary" at dawn; clearing outside the southeast corner of the "granary;" hand-built pot, ca. 3100 BCE; large square unicorn seal, a symbol found throughout the culture; deep digging at the "granary" reveals buildings dated to ca 2450 BCE. The visible "granary" appears to have been constructed ca. 2300 BCE, with a third structure built on top after 2200 BCE.

WWW.HARAPPAN.COM, WWW.MOHENJODARO.NET



Hindu Heritage Endowment

PLANNED GIVING TO HHE CHARITIES



What is planned giving? A planned gift can be any kind of gift, large or small, and can be for any purpose. While gifts of cash are the largest source of charitable gifts, planned gifts are typically not outright cash gifts. Rather, they are sizeable asset gifts, such as life insurance, real estate, stocks and bonds or mutual funds to be used in the future. Charitable remainder trusts, gift annuities and other gift-planning arrangements are regularly funded using assets other than cash. Another definition of planned giving is the process of making a charitable gift of estate assets to one or more nonprofit organizations, such as Hindu Heritage Endowment.

The most common example of a planned gift is through a Will. A revocable Living Trust resembles a Will, and setting it up is more involved, but it may have advantages for some people. Another example is a charitable remainder trust. During the life of a person, he or another person receives an income from the trust and then the remaining assets would go to one or more charities. In 2005 the Iraivan Hindu Temple Fund, HHE fund #2, received over US\$1.3 million from a charitable remainder trust.

Life insurance policies provide the means by which a donor can make a large charitable gift at a modest out-of-pocket cost. There are three ways to give through life insurance: (1) the charity is the beneficiary of the policy; (2) the charity is the owner and beneficiary of the policy; and (3) the life insurance policy is a replacement for donated assets. Several HHE endowments are beneficiaries of life insurance policies.

A popular deferred gift is the charitable gift annuity, which is a lifetime contract between the donor and the charity. It is relatively simple to understand and establish. The donor can also name someone else as the annuitant to receive the annuity payments. The donor gives a gift, \$50,000 for example, and receives a set amount of money every year for the rest of his or her life.

Some planned gifts, such a charitable gift annuity, are irrevocable. Others, such as will bequests, can be revoked. Depending on the country of the donor, an irrevocable gift can generate an immediate income tax charitable deduction, whereas revocable gifts do not. A planned gift requires careful thought on the part of the donor, considering his or her overall estate plan. Legal documents, created with the help of planned giving professionals, are often required. Planned gifts are usually arranged now and fulfilled later. There are numerous professional advisors in the charitable gift-planning field: certified financial planners; estate planning attorneys; life insurance professionals; certified public accountants and trust officers.

In the US, the National Committee on Planned Giving is the primary association linking planned giving officers and allied professionals. More than 120 planned giving councils represent 11,000 gift planners. For the council nearest you call 317-269-6274 or visit www.ncpg.org. In Canada the Canadian Association of Gift Planners represents 1,000 gift planners throughout the country. Their website is www.cagp-acpdp.org and the contact number is 888-430-9494.

The Charities Aid Foundation in the UK is committed to helping donors give in a tax-efficient and easy way. Visit their website at www.cafonline.org/individual/ and download their guide to tax-effective giving. CAF also has offices in India, Australia, Bulgaria, Brussels, Russia, Southern Africa and the USA.

New to planned giving and want to learn more? Please visit HHE's planned giving link at www.hheonline.org. Here you can read all about providing the security you seek from your investments while eventually providing much-needed gifts to one or more of the 65 HHE endowments and their charities.

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment Anonymous US\$100.00 Rajendra Giri 21.00 Gunasekaran Kandasamy 320.00 Niraj Thaker 14.20 Other Donations 81,452.73 Total 81,907.93	Kailasa Peedam Gift Fund Rajendra Giri 21.00 Total 21.00	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund Anonymous 225.00 Lila Shakti Devi 125.00 Rajendra Giri 21.00 Gunasekaran Kandasamy 320.00 Ramakumar & Sallaja Kosuru 30.00 Sukesh Parasher 50.00 Alex Ruberto 55.00 Rakesh Sood 125.00 Rodney & Ilene Standen 30.00 Rajeswari Sundararajan 10.00 Niraj Thaker 14.20 Total 1,005.20	Sakuntalai Krishnan 29.21 Manoharan Navaratnarajah 150.00 Shanta Devi Periasamy 230.00 Alex Ruberto 45.00 Chamundi Sabanathan 101.00 Niraj Thaker 14.20 Jeremiah Umakanthan 25.50 Vayudeva Varadan 18.00 Total 957.91	Karnataka Temple Development Fund Rajendra Giri 21.00 Hiranya & Saraswathi Gowda 606.16 Total 627.16
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	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment Anonymous 50.00 Rajendra Giri 21.00 Manoharan Navaratnarajah 75.00 Total 146.00	Saiva Agamas Trust Rajendra Giri 21.00 Total 21.00	Manitha Neyam Trust Fund Bala Sivaceyon 20.98 Total 20.98	Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment Anonymous 146.00 Daren Clare 7.00 Lila Shakti Devi 72.50 Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 40.13 Rajendra Giri 21.00 Julia Hall 75.00 Simon Low 108.00 Yuvraj Saharan 10.00 Jutikadevi Sivaraja 324.00 Silas H. Zirkle 375.00 Total 1,178.63
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	Hinduism Today Production Fund Rajendra Giri 21.00 Amit Kale 8.33 Total 29.33	Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund Rajendra Giri 21.00 Total 21.00	Kerala Temple Trust Rajendra Giri 21.00 Total 21.00	Pooled Income Fund Rajendra Giri 1,000.00 Satya Palani 1,875.00 Total 2,875.00
	Vishwamata Gayatri Trust Fund Mohan Rao Korukonda 75.50 Total 75.50	Mauritius Saiva Dharmasala Endowment Rajendra Giri 21.00 Total 21.00	Taos Hanuman Fund Rajendra Giri 21.00 Total 21.00	Funds at Market Value, March 31, 2006 Total Endowment Funds \$7,147,514.82 Total Pooled Income Funds \$205,964.42
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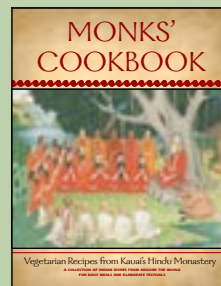
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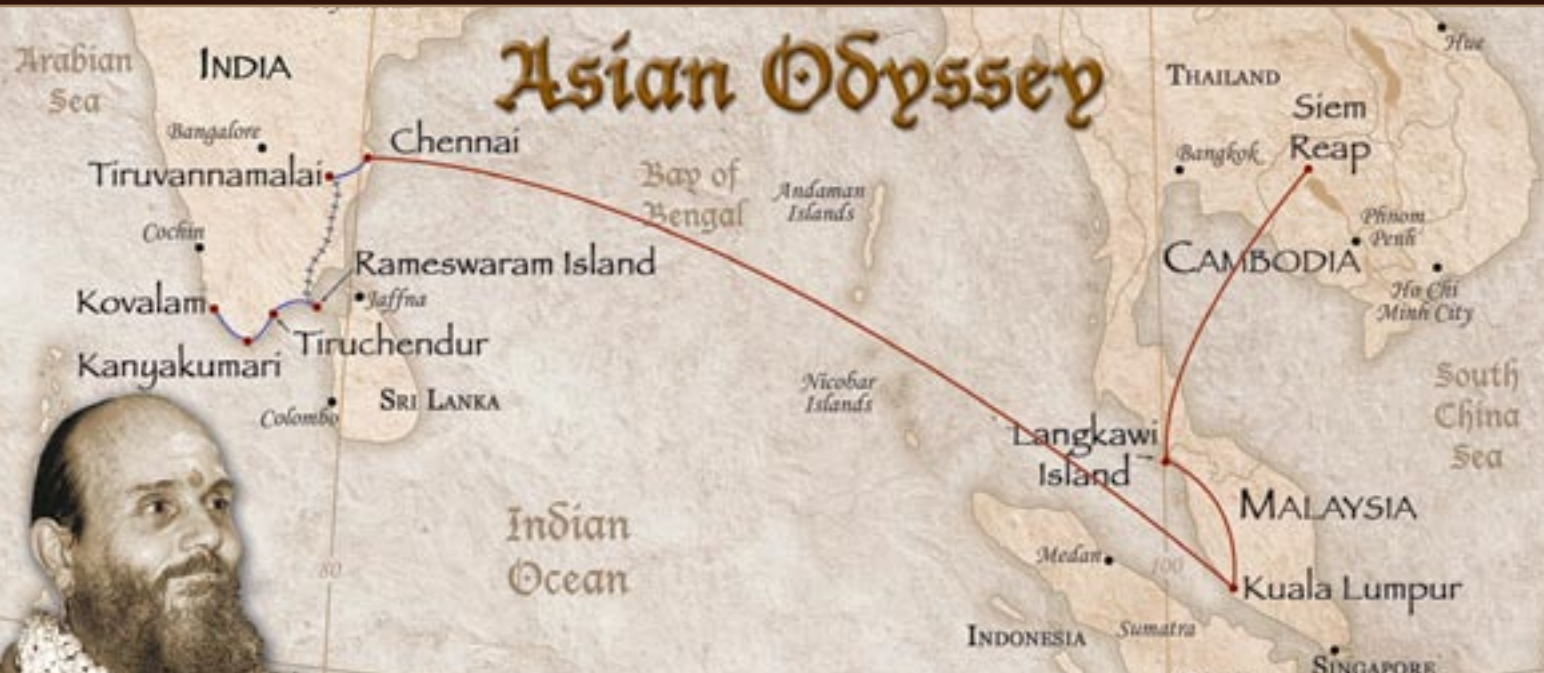
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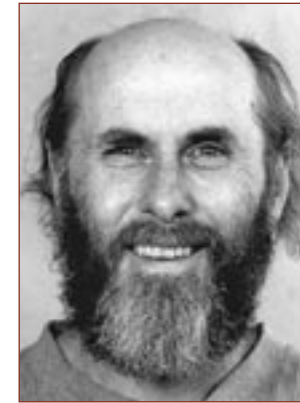


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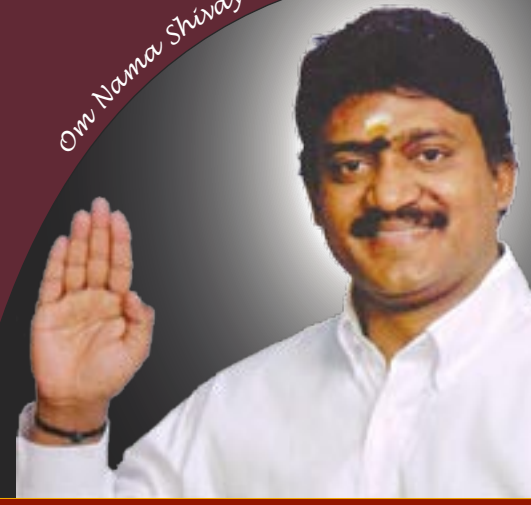
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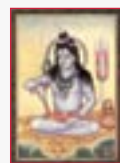
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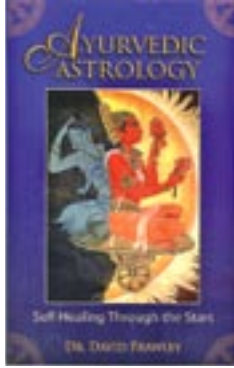
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Nataraj Murti, hand painted resin; 10.5 inches high, 8.5 inches wide; 1.5 lbs. **\$15 K37**

Ganesh Lingam Murti, hand painted resin, fountain flows from top of lingam into lotus flower; with internal light in Ganesh's body (glows in the dark). 12 inches high, 11 inches wide, 6 lbs. **\$54 L11**

Sri Yantra 18 K Gold, actual size is 2 inches square. **\$180 YG22**



Chakra Pendants

Sudarshan chakra design with brilliant cubic zirconium to invoke divine protection. Silver, 1.25 inch, **\$12 CPS 18K**, 1.15 inch, **\$99 CPG**



22K Gold Kavaca, Remove end cap for internal storage; 1 inch, **\$81 KAVG**



Durga on Tiger 6 inches, hand painted resin. **\$8 A23**



Ganesh 2 inches **\$3 K20**



Lotus Laxmi Fountain, hand painted resin; 9.5 inches high, 7-inch diameter; 2 lbs. **\$36 L12**



Shiva Family Fountain, hand painted resin; water flows from Ganesh's conch; transparent lingam has light inside; there are four lights including three pulsing LEDs in green, red and blue color to create a fountain of colors in the dark; 17 inches high, 13 inches diameter; 16 lbs. **\$108 L09**



Big Ganesh Ji, hand painted resin; 17.5 inches high, 11.5 inches wide; 10 lbs. **\$99 L13**



Baby Ganesh Napping, hand painted resin; mouse and laddus are separate pieces; 3 by 6 inches, **\$9 K36**



Durga Fountain, hand painted resin; water comes out of the big lotus in the center and cascades down the lotus leaves; 15 inches high, 11 inches wide; 10 lbs. **\$90 L08**



The Artist & His Art

What forces of fate have brought me to sit
Beside the Manasorova Lake?
My eyes are on The Mountain Yonder
In the distance, The Kailash Wonder.

My heart is free of weight
Such that arises from harbouring hate.
Sitting here, feeling there is no tomorrow
Not that my soul has not been touched by sorrow.

The Artist and His Art
Cause a lingering sadness in my heart.
Is all the beauty before me in vain?
Is this an illusion? And is this the cause of my pain?

In body or in spirit, where I am is my Home;
My reality of the moment is the Yonder Dome.
On the sand shores I pray:
Is the Artist and His Art the same?
Against the dull sky gray, the word comes:
The answer is in the game.

Matter is art, and in a World of matter,
Matter matters to the spirit:
Give me three meals a day
A roof over my head;
Money to travel;
And I shall take a boat on the Nile
Contemplating on Art all the Way.

A glass of red wine Is art by itself.
A lady in stone is cold.
A model on the catwalk is totally a different matter.
An eagle in ice.
An actor in wax.
Art in words, a poet's world.
Art in oil, a painter's world.
Art in sand, dreams of children.

Fascinated by art in glass;
Elevated by poetry in words;
Inspired by Mandela on the African canvas.
Art in light, shades of delight.
Art in clay, a potter's play.

A volcano in eruption is art in awe.
The California cedar fires are art in terror raw.
The Cosmos in Art
Is the Dancing Shiva.

What Forces bring me to this Lake,
In the evening of my life so late?
On the sand shores, I again ask –

By Dr Arjunan Subramaniam
31st October 2003
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia